Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs

Review Committee Report and Recommendations

July 2007

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  - Nova Scotia School Boards Association, Mary Jess MacDonald
  - Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Ron Brunton
  - Autism Society Nova Scotia, Vicki Harvey
  - Department of Health, Children's Services, Patricia Murray
  - Learning Disability Association of Nova Scotia, Annie Baert
  - Nova Scotia Association for Community Living, Mary Rothman

The Minister's Review Committee acknowledges the important contributions of many people and thanks them for their assistance.

Preface

The Minister's Review Committee immediately recognized in undertaking this work that a review of services for students with special needs was de facto a review of the status of inclusive schooling in Nova Scotia. Therefore, it is important to set the context for the reading of the results of this review by drawing upon relevant research and practices in the area of equity and education, as well as some of the history of inclusive schooling in Nova Scotia.

In 1991, the Department of Education issued a Statement on Integration that outlined the roles of the Department of Education and the district school boards in providing public education appropriate for all students. This statement worked from the premise that the integration of students with "exceptional needs" into regular classes should happen and be supported, as it offered the best opportunity for most students. As the statement noted, the integration of students with exceptional needs into regular classrooms required a profound change in thinking and operating for the education system, and the implementation of integration would be long term.

Today, educators recognize that inclusive schooling is not only about placement decisions and not only about students with identified disabilities. Inclusive education takes into account disability, gender/sexuality, race, culture, and socio-economic class. Inclusion is "an attitude and value system that promotes the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers." (Nova Scotia Department of Education 2006: Inclusion fact sheet)

Nova Scotia's policies and inclusive educational practice adhere to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms [15(1)] and recognize the role that systemic barriers can play in the education of students identified as special needs. Students with special needs are learners who require supports beyond typical classroom instruction. In this report we use MacKay's (2006) definition of the term "special needs" to include students who are identified as gifted and talented, "at risk," or "struggling" learners or as having educationally relevant disabilities. Students with special needs are more likely to face social exclusion from opportunities that the majority of Canadian children take for granted (Hanvey 2001). As legal scholar Wayne MacKay (2006) has stated, Canadian courts have "placed a high value on equal access for all and the elimination of systemic barriers" (p. 7).

According to Porter (2004), parents are supportive of the ideals of inclusive schooling only when they are confident that the school welcomes their child and when their teachers are well trained and supported. Teachers also recognize that inclusive practice is sound educational practice that benefits all students while addressing fundamental issues of equity, rights, and social justice (Bunch 1998; French 1998). It is the responsibility of the public school system to provide access to appropriate education for all students in Nova Scotia. This is not always easy in a province with the geographical, demographic, and fiscal realities of Nova Scotia. It is vital to remember that in terms of equity "fairness is not sameness" (Schwarz 2006).

For a public education system to meet the challenges inherent to educating all learners within the context of inclusive schooling policies and practices, sufficient resources and supports must be in place. This report will focus on findings and recommendations related to building Nova Scotia public schools' capacity to reach the goals of inclusive schooling.

Background

In 1996 the Nova Scotia Department of Education developed its first special education policy and issued the *Special Education Policy Manual.* The policies and guidelines were intended to further promote the development of educational programming for students with special needs. This was a significant step in ensuring that all learners across the province had access to programs and supports to meet their learning needs.

The *Special Education Policy Manual* was supported by legislation, "(Bill 39) *An Act Respecting Education,* which promotes the principles of inclusion, builds on the strengths of partnerships and enables parents to take part in individual program planning as part of school program planning teams." (MacEachern 1997)

The *Special Education Policy Manual* made important statements in areas of

- right to an appropriate education
- right to quality education and quality teachers
- inclusive schooling
- teacher responsibility
- parental involvement
- individual program plans and accountability
- collaboration

The statements and the policies contained in the *Special Education Policy Manual* had an immediate impact on public schooling practices in Nova Scotia.

In June 2001, after a comprehensive review process involving representation from all education stakeholders, the *Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee* (SEIR) was released. This report represented a progress report on the implementation of the special education policy of 1996. The SEIR committee made 34 recommendations to further improve programming and services for students with special needs.

In September 2003 the Department of Education document *Learning for Life: Planning for Success* laid out a three-year plan that committed targeted funding to continue to improve learning outcomes for students with special needs. Also in 2003, the Department of Education released *Effective Special Education Programming and Services: Response to the Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee.* It provided a detailed response to each of the recommendations contained in the SEIR report and identified the actions the government was taking to enhance special education programming and services. The document noted that while many of the recommendations from the SEIR report were under way, the Nova Scotia government recognized that there was still more to do. The report indicated the government's commitment to continuing to work with its partners to further improve the learning environment for students with special needs.

Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together and *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together 2005–2006 Annual Report* and *2006–2007 Action Plan* also identify actions that have been undertaken to address the recommendations in the *Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee*.

In early 2007, Minister of Education Karen Casey named a three-person review committee consisting of Dr. Lynn Aylward, Mr. Walter Farmer, and Mr. Miles MacDonald to conduct a Review of Services for Students with Special Needs.

A six-person committee was also named to act in an advisory capacity to the review committee:

- Nova Scotia School Boards Association, Mary Jess MacDonald
- Nova Scotia Teachers Union, Ron Brunton
- Autism Society Nova Scotia, Vicki Harvey
- Department of Health, Children's Services, Patricia Murray
- Learning Disability Association of Nova Scotia, Annie Baert
- Nova Scotia Association for Community Living, Mary Rothman

The purpose of this review was to

- determine whether the funding provided by the Department of Education to support individual programming and services initiatives has resulted in the intended outcome
- make recommendations that will improve the outcomes of current initiatives
- identify new programs and/or program adjustments to be considered by the department that have been shown to be effective educational practices for children and youth with special needs.

The committee was to provide the Minister with a report no later than June 29, 2007.

The committee based its report on the results of the following:

- public consultations via public meetings in all eight regional school board areas
- meetings with the superintendent, student services administration, and regional school board members in each regional school area
- public consultations via online and written response forms (Appendix C 1 and Appendix C 2)
- an invitation to participate in the review issued to education partners (Appendix B)
- meetings with Department of Education Student Services consultants and staff in relevant program areas
- research and review of all relevant Department of Education student services documents and reports (Appendix F - Resources)
- research and review of current literature in the area of inclusive schooling and program planning for students with special needs (Appendix F - Resources)

Key Findings

The Keys Findings section, which follows, addresses comments by the committee on the action to date from the Special Education Implementation Review response work plan, the Department of Education implementations of the 34 recommendations in the 2001 report. Appendix D presents a summary of the review process, survey responses, and group and individual submissions, as well as the key findings from public and board-level consultations.

SEIRC Report: Action to Date

SEIR Response Work Plan (Updated January 2007)				
No.	**Recommendation(s)**	**Action to Date**	**Time**	**Review Committee Comments**
1	The Department of Education and school boards should develop a communication plan to improve understanding of inclusive schooling and programming and services for students with special needs.	• Fact sheets: – *Adaptations*: completed – *Inclusion*: completed – *Program Planning Process*: completed – *Transition Planning*: completed – *Enrichment*: completed – *Assistive Technology*: completed • Identification and Assessment: pending completion • The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents: completed • Speech-Language Pathology Guidelines: DRAFT • School Psychology Guidelines: DRAFT • Autism Resource Guide: DRAFT	 2004 2004 2006 2005 2007 2006 2006 2006 2006 2006	The Department of Education has overseen the production of a number of excellent print, video, and DVD resources. All, with the exception of the ones in "draft" form, are available on the Department of Education website. Some documents are in PowerPoint format. School boards have followed the lead of the Department of Education and have produced materials specific to their respective regions. The response data indicates there are parents of children with special needs who are unaware of Department of Education documents.
2	The Department of Education and school boards should establish common terminology in special education.	• Discussion at Student Services coordinators' meetings and with senior department and school board staff • Draft proposal completed	ongoing	This initiative appears to be in the final stage. Consensus has been reached on "common terms." There has been no resolution of the terminology around "teacher assistant" because of collective agreements. The Department of Education uses the term "teacher assistant" in section 40(3) (c) of the Education Act and in the *Special Education Policy Manual*. As school boards are required to have policies consistent with those of the Minister, school boards should be required to use this terminology in collective agreements.

	3	The Department of Education, university faculties of education, school boards, and the Nova Scotia Teachers Union (NSTU) should collaborate on the development and implementation of an ongoing in-service plan for teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and teacher assistants on programming and services for students with special needs.	• Inclusive schooling module for administrators developed with NSELC – Review of NSELC module to update • Implement *Supporting Student Success: Resource Programming and Services* teaching guide • Video series and guides to support teachers in collaboration with school boards: – Video on *Enrichment Clusters* developed – Video companion guide developed – Video on *Total Talent Portfolios* developed – Co-teaching video and guide completed – Video on *Options in Programming* • Collaborative initiatives: Autism Training (Summer/05); IASE Conference (July/05); Atlantic Reading Recovery™ Conference (June/05), Early Intervention Conference (November 2006, Annual LD Conference • Final draft Assistive Technology Resource Guide • Review/update list of Authorized Learning Resources • Provincial Autism Advisory Team established to advise on PD and training • Provincial autism training and PD with partners in the Departments of Health and Community Services and advocacy organizations	2002 2006 2003 2003 2004 2004 2005 2006 2005 2006 2006 ongoing 2006 2005, ongoing	The Department of Education has worked with some educational partners to provide a number of high-quality professional development initiatives. Many teachers/administrators have availed themselves of the opportunity to upgrade in these areas. The use of video materials is an innovative approach to the dissemination of information. The partnership with other government agencies and advocacy organizations is a positive indicator of collaboration. Although there is evidence of collaboration between some partners, this does not fulfil the intent of the recommendation. The recommendation called on the partners to collaborate on "the development and implementation of an "ongoing in-service plan" for teachers, administrators, professional support staff, and teacher assistants on programming and services for students with special needs."

	4	The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement information and training sessions for parents regarding the special education policy, programming, and services for students with special needs, and issues surrounding specific disabilities.	• Related to Rec. 11. Targeted funding provided to school boards for parent information sessions. • Copies of *Program Planning Guide for Parents*, Fact Sheets, and PowerPoint Presentation developed and disseminated to boards (as per #11)	2006 2006	*The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents* is an excellent address to this recommendation. This document may need revision now that the common terminology issue is resolved. The reference that "parents should be involved" in the program planning process needs to be a more assertive statement ("parents need to be active participants"). (recognize parents cannot be forced to participate)
	5	The Department of Education, school boards, NSTU, and faculties of education should design and implement an annual institute to provide opportunities for education professionals to share and network effective/promising practices.	• Summer Institutes to date: (640) • Resource Programming and Services (85) • Programming for Students with Extensive Needs (47) • ESL Guidelines (25) • Conflict Mediation (21) • Leadership for Inclusive Schooling (27) • Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (26) • Autism Training (7-day institute) (43) • Positive and Effective Behaviour Supports (366) (There is no way of knowing if a person attended more than one.)	2002 2002 2003 2003 2004 2003 2004 2005 2006	In addition to the initiatives cited, the Department of Education hosts an annual meeting of school principals and meets regularly with the student services co-ordinators according to policy 1.5. The NSSBA held an Information Forum (2007) to highlight innovative practices within the regional boards. The NSTU held a series of roundtable forums (2007) with respect to *Time to Teach/Time to Learn*. The NSELC modules are available throughout the school year and in the summer months. The intent of the recommendation was for the partners to jointly "design and implement an annual institute." There is no indication this has occurred. As in #3, the spirit of the recommendation has been acted upon, but the intent of the recommendation has not been fully addressed.

	6	The Department of Education and school boards should review existing referral and assessment practices of school boards and develop uniform guidelines that • establish appropriate and timely referral and assessment practices • describe ongoing links between assessment and instructional practices	• School Psychology Guidelines: DRAFT completed • Speech-Language Pathology Guidelines: preliminary DRAFT	2006 2006	Uniform guidelines and reporting mechanisms are required to evaluate the delivery of services. The "gap" analysis indicates that more personnel are being funded and hired by school boards. A number of school boards continue to report wait-lists for services. There will never be enough. The response data indicates a high level of dissatisfaction with respect to the referral and assessment process. During the consultation process, the review committee heard dissatisfaction related to this same area.
	7	The Department of Education, university faculties of education, and school boards in consultation with teachers should collaborate to design, implement, and evaluate professional development opportunities for resource and classroom teachers, including institutes and courses on identification and assessment practices.	• Cohorts at MSVU and St. F. X—Resource Teaching and Framework developed for partnership between boards and universities • APEF collaborative consultation: Universities, Department of Education, Teachers Unions • Reading Recovery™ Training in French developed by NS universities and CIRR • Reading Recovery™ Training for French Immersion in development • Department of Education collaboration with Acadia University to provide access for teachers to guidance and counselling master's degree in Cape Breton and southwest Nova Scotia	2002–present 2004 2003 2004 2006	The initiatives mentioned here, as in earlier recommendations, are excellent professional development opportunities. The Professional Learning Community approach is an opportunity for staffs to learn together. Teaching effectively in an inclusive classrooms and the use of assistive technology were cited by teachers as areas requiring more professional development. Building a teacher's capacity to teach to a range of diverse student strengths and needs will result in more students being successful.

	8	The Department of Education should set targets and provide financial support for appropriate numbers of qualified professionals in the school system to support the identification and assessment process.	• A total of $8.4 million additional targeted funding was provided from 2003–2006 to improve number of core professional service ratios.	2003–2006	The gap analysis report illustrates that target funding has enabled boards to approach and/or surpass the stated minimum ratios which reflect national norms. The ratios stated are "minimum" levels of support. As national norms shift, the ratios will require adjustment. Wayne MacKay, in his report on inclusive education in New Brunswick (2006), cited lower ratios: (S-LP 1:1000; SP 1:1000; Soc. Wk. 1:3000; Nurses to, RNA/LPN, 1:1400) MacKay gives recognition to the loss in service due to travel in rural areas, a factor Nova Scotia should also consider.
	9	The Department of Education should establish a committee including NSTU and school boards to review and recommend by November 1, 2001, ways to ensure teachers have sufficient time available for program planning.	• $500,000 in Teachers Provincial Agreement	2003 and ongoing	The $500,000 provided under Article 63 of the collective agreements between the NSTU and government has been a valid address to this recommendation. It is also a positive recognition of the value that all participants bring to the PPP. Parents indicated satisfaction with this initiative. Teachers via the response data have indicated a desire to have more options identified under this article. (Collective bargaining issue)

	10	The Department of Education and school boards should develop and implement a guide for teachers, administrators, and professional support personnel, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of all involved in the program planning process.	• *Supporting Student Success: Resource Programming and Services*—Completed • *Guidelines for ESL, Oral Language Proficiency Assessment*—Completed • *Code of Conduct Guidelines*—Final DRAFT Completed (S.47 amendments pending approval) • *Transition Planning Guidelines*—Completed • *School Psychology Guidelines*—Final DRAFT Completed • *Student Records Policy*—Completed • *Meeting Behavioural Challenges* (CAMET)—Completed • *Program Planning Guide for Parents*—Completed with accompanying fact sheet • *Speech-Language Pathology Guidelines*—Preliminary Draft	2002 2003 2005 2005 2006 2006 2006 2006	The recommendation calls for "a guide" that clarifies the roles and responsibilities of the various participants involved in the Program Planning Process. The Program Planning: A Team Approach fact sheet and the parent guide fulfil the recommendation.
	11	The Department of Education, in consultation with the Special Education Programs and Services Committee (SEPS), should develop a guide for parents on the program planning process and the role of all partners in the process.		2006	The Department of Education has produced an excellent guide. The Department of Education should consider making future guides more child-centred in focus, similar to the NSCC guide Supporting Your Child at College.
	12	Each school board should develop and implement a strategy consistent with the guide to enhance meaningful parent involvement in the program planning process.	• Summer 2003, 2004 Institutes—Conflict Mediation for Educators Working with Parents in Program Planning • Targeted funding provided to school boards to support implementation of *The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents*	See #4, #5, #17 2006	All boards indicated they have accessed the target funding made available for this purpose. Indications are the sessions were very well attended. Target funds must continue to be available so boards can annually present information sessions.

	13	Government, through the Child and Youth Action Committee (CAYAC), should ensure inter-agency collaboration to enhance access to programs and services for children and youth with special needs.	• *Transition Planning Handbook*—Completed • *EIIS Brochure*—Completed • Draft *Transfer of Specialized Health Care Functions Protocol* completed and developed for boards and district health authorities • Provincial Transition Committee under CAYAC established • 3 pilot sites to enhance post high school transition options under development—Framework in place • Increased funding to support educational programming for children and youth in institutional settings • Guidelines for the administration of medication for school—aged children and youth • Medical Procedures Committee established to define roles and responsibilities and transfer of function protocols	2005 2003 2003 2004 2005 2005 2006 2006	The Child and Youth Action Committee is now the Child and Youth Social Policy Committee. Progress has been slow in most areas, because individual school boards may have to deal with more than one local health and/or community services authority. This occurs because school regions and government departments/authorities are not aligned. An early identification/intervention service (EIIS) between health and education, which was valued and well received, is no longer in operation. Government, through the Executive Director of Child and Youth Strategy (Department of Community Services) must develop a more comprehensive approach for dealing with youth issues. The Department of Health provides service via the EIBI initiative.
	14	The Department of Education should define core services and desired service ratios (based on recognized professional standards) for professional staff at the school board and school levels.	• Learning for Life targeted funding to achieve recommended core professional services ratios. • Gap analysis to track progress	2003 Annual	The Department of Education has established *minimum* service ratios based on national norms. Current data is 10 years old. As stated earlier, the Department of Education must monitor national norms and adjust ratios accordingly.

	15	The Department of Education should engage a person on a short-term contract with expertise and qualifications in the educational applications of assistive technology to design a framework for the acquisition, distribution, and provision of a full range of assistive technology devices and services for the P–12 school system.	• Provincial committee formed • Draft completed	2004	The Department of Education has complied with the intent of this recommendation. The Minister provided funding to school boards to assist in this area.
	16	The Department of Education and school boards should review and update the list of Authorized Learning Resources to facilitate access to appropriate multi-level resources for students and teachers in both English and French.	• Staff involved in ALR process on an ongoing basis • Resources added to support Challenge for Excellence and Active Young Readers (P–9) • Co-operative Discipline Training completed for leaders in boards.	ongoing	The Department of Education has identified this as an ongoing process. CSAP has cited a problem (having guides translated into French; not readily available). CSAP and teachers across the province stated a need for multi-level/grade resources. Issues related to CSAP may also be common to the French-language school boards in both New Brunswick and PEI. The Department of Education may wish to explore the possibility of an inter-provincial protocol as one way to address some of the issues unique to CSAP.
	17	The Department of Education, in consultation with education partners, should develop programming guidelines and strategies to support students with behavioural challenges in the school system.	• APEF/CAMET documents developed on behaviour strategies • *Code of Conduct Guidelines* completed • Four behaviour intervention pilots implemented • Comprehensive Guidance and Counselling training • PD training re Code of Conduct, APEF/CAMET • Behaviour Resource, *Positive and Effective Behaviour Supports* (200 schools)	2004 2004 2004-05 2001 ongoing April 2006	The PEBS initiative has been well received as a response to this issue. As indicated in #5, 640 teachers and administrators have taken advantage of PD opportunities. The Department of Education information points to a decrease in schools where the Behaviour Incident Tracking Form is being used (referrals and suspensions have decreased). School boards have accessed target funding under the Increasing Learning Success initiative to develop suspension intervention strategies.

	18	The Department of Education, through the Education Funding Committee, should address the issue of class size guidelines and related funding requirements.	See Learning for Life targeted funding	2003–2006	The P–3 cap of 25 and the 20:1 ratio are positive measures. The delay in implementing the grade 4 cap is a disappointing setback.
	19	The Department of Education should provide an immediate injection of $20 million in the 2002–2003 fiscal year targeted to a base level of core services and appropriate service ratios.	(See recommendation #14)		The expenditures in support of the Learning for Life initiatives have met and exceeded the initial request.
	20	Core services should be reviewed annually by the Special Education Programs and Services Committee to recommend appropriate service funding level to the Minister.	• Initiative Challenge Funding (pilots) Evaluation • Gap analysis to monitor progress on recommended ratios	2003–2006 Annual	As identified, The Department of Education must conduct an annual review. (See comments under recommendation #8.)
	21	The Department of Education should cost the recommendations in the SEIRC report and include them in the funding plan in time for the next budget cycle. The plan will identify how the additional funding should be targeted to address the needs in the following priority areas: • professional development • support for emotional/behaviourally challenged children • learning resources for students with special needs • assistive technology • teacher time for program planning and implementation	• See *Effective Special Education Programming and Services: Response to the Report of the Special Education Implementation Review Committee*	2003	The various initiatives cited throughout this response paper have addressed the spirit of the recommendation. The additional funds provided via the Learning For Life initiatives and Article 63 (Agreement between The Minister & NSTU) reflect the support of the Minister and The Department of Education.

	22	Additional funding should be included in the resource credit allocation for schools to reflect the need for additional learning resources for students with special needs.	• *Active Young Readers* 4–6—$50,000 • Reading Recovery™ (new schools)—$20,000 • *Active Readers* 7—Resources $95,000 • *Active Readers* 8—Resources $63,000 • *Challenge for Excellence*—$40,000 • Resource Teachers Math Kits—$60,000 • *Active Readers* 9—Resources • ESL Resource Kits—$15,000	2002 2003 2003 2004 2004 2004 2005 2005	The initiatives cited here are a positive, first-step to addressing this recommendation. More has to be done! One area cited was the provision of multi-level/grade resources. More Level B assessment tools are needed. More life skills resources should be listed (e.g., functional mathematics, personal care, occupational preparation).
	23	School boards should monitor individual program plans (IPPs) to ensure that the outcomes developed and implemented are appropriate and measurable. In addition, a consistent system should be developed to track, monitor, and report to parents student progress and achievement on outcomes stated in IPPs.	• IPP template developed for provincial report card • Revised Reporting Policy Framework to include IPPs	2003 2003	The Department of Education must ensure that school boards are using the IPP reporting template and are providing PD opportunities for teachers. The success of the IPP is dependent upon having outcomes that are appropriate and measurable. This is an area teachers have identified as a professional development need.
	24	As recommend in Post-Shapiro Review of Teacher Education in Nova Scotia, October 2000, the Minister should ensure there is a mechanism to monitor pre-service teacher education programs and propose policy changes. All teachers who successfully complete an approved program of initial teacher education and are certified to teach in Nova Scotia should have undertaken course work that addresses programming in special education and practica within inclusive settings that involves working with a diverse range of students who have special needs.	• APEF dialogue with universities—Meeting—PEI • University/Department of Education Liaison Committee Group Registrars Meeting • Report on Pre-Service Training to APEF	2003 (3x a year) 2004	This remains an area of concern to teachers (as reflected by their response forms). It is important to note that the Minister has struck a Teacher Education Review Committee to examine this area.

	25	Notwithstanding contractual agreements, the Department of Education should define or adopt, and school boards should adhere to, competencies and/or professional qualifications in hiring or assigning persons responsible for providing core special education services (e.g., resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, school psychologists, student services co-ordinators).	• Competencies for resource teachers updated • Competencies for Student Services Co-ordinators • Qualifications for School Psychologists Guidelines • Competencies for ESL Teachers • Qualifications for Speech-Language Pathologists Guidelines DRAFT • Qualifications for Guidance Counsellors	2002–2003 2002–2003 2006 2003–2004 2006 2006	The Department of Education has established competency guidelines in most areas. It must monitor and ensure that school boards adhere to these guidelines. The areas of speech-language pathologists and school psychologists are governed by the licensing requirements of external organizations/agencies.
	26	School boards should ensure that each school implements "Tracking Our Progress" as part of their school improvement planning. School boards should submit an annual report on implementation to the Department of Education, which will in turn be shared with SEPS.	• Piloted with Cape Breton Regional School Board—Implementation 2004–2005	2003–2004	As noted, implemented in 2004–2005. Currently, boards report on the use of funds re special education policy implementation funding.
	27	School boards should monitor resource teacher allocations in schools to ensure appropriate utilization of allocated staff and effective implementation of resource programs and services.	• Review of submission of student services data	Annual	The Department of Education does this on an annual basis.
	28	The Department of Education, in consultation with school boards, should identify core competencies for teacher assistants to be included in training programs for teacher assistants.	• Identified competencies and shared with boards • Development of a joint approach to training with NSCC under way	2002–2003 2006	Guidelines have been issued, competencies developed and a training program has commenced at five NSCC sites.
	29	School boards should develop short- and long-term plans for the provision of barrier-free access to, and within, educational facilities as mandated under Section 64(2)(e) of the *Education Act* and include updates on implementation of their plans as part of their annual report to the Minister of Education.	• Preliminary database developed • Provide SEPS committee with annual outline of each board's progress re barrier-free access in existing and new schools • Template developed to refine information and planning cycle; technology solution for online submission completed • Expected implementation in September 2007	Spring/04 June 2004 2006	The Department of Education reached consensus on a template in this critical area in 2006. School boards have been reporting annually but with little or no consistency. The template will provide a much-needed focus. This is an area the government must adequately fund, as access is essential for most disabled students.

	30	The department should table an annual report with SEPS on progress in implementing the special education policy and the recommendations in this report and on the resources provided to school boards and schools to assist in implementation.	• Boards report progress relating to programming and services for students with special needs in their annual business plans • Information shared with SEPS • Annual submission of student services data by boards reviewed to monitor service ratios	2001–02 2002–03 2003–04 Annual See #14	Personnel within the Department of Education report to the Minister and keeps SEPS apprised of progress on a regular basis.
	31	The Department of Education, in consultation with the current SEPS committee, should review the role, mandate, and membership of the SEPS in light of additional responsibilities recommended by this report.	• SEPS committee reported • Report submitted to Deputy Minister • Report revised and approved	2003 Oct. 2003 2006	This is the responsibility of the Deputy Minister and has been carried out.
	32	The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should provide professional development for board office and school administrators and student services personnel in mediation skills to increase their ability to ensure that disputes regarding IPPs are resolved in a manner that is timely and minimizes the necessity of using the formal appeal process.	• Summer Institute—Conflict Mediation for Educators Working with Parents in Program Planning • Leadership for Inclusive Schooling	2003–04 2002–03 2004	The actions cited fulfil the spirit of the recommendation. As there are always changes to staff, the address needs to be ongoing and should be reflected as such under the time line header.

	33	The Department of Education, in collaboration with school boards, should adopt mandatory procedures for the school board level appeal process that ensure timely resolution, specific recommendations, and parent involvement in selection of the review panel (similar to those afforded in the provincial appeal process).	• *School Board and Ministerial Appeal Guidelines* reviewed to clarify roles and responsibilities	2004 2006	Regarding 33 and 34: The real issue is the *appropriateness* of the Tuition Support Program. The province has a responsibility to provide a publicly funded school system to include programs and services for all students to enable them to develop to their full potential and acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. School boards are required to make provision for the education and instruction of all students enrolled in their schools and programs and to develop and implement educational programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings with their peers. The Tuition Support Program could be seen as an abdication of these responsibilities. The Department of Education must adequately fund school boards to enable them to address the needs of all learners. Some learners may require specialized instruction (low pupil–teacher ratios and/or teachers with special competency in teaching students with exceptionalities such as, ADD/ADHDSLD/LD; Down syndrome; severe autism). Tuition agreements should be used when a school board cannot provide a program for a student with special needs.
	34	The Department of Education and school boards should develop an information package on the appeal process to be distributed to parents institutions where there is an unresolved dispute regarding IPP outcomes or placement.	• Tuition Support Program established • Regulations updated • DRAFT *Handbook on School Board and Ministerial Appeal* Procedures; pending approval of regulations	2004 2006 2006	

Recommendations

The Minister's Review Committee recommends that

1.0 The Department of Education reaffirm its commitment to and support of inclusive education in the next update of the *Special Education Policy Manual.*

The 1996 *Special Education Policy Manual* provided the policy direction with regard to the education of students with special needs. One of the key principles noted in the *Special Education Policy Manual* is inclusive schooling. Much has happened over the past number of years that demonstrates the province's commitment to inclusive schooling.

Any revisions to the *Special Education Policy Manual* must clearly state why inclusive schooling is sound educational practice and recognize that inclusive schooling practices need to be fully supported and implemented for the success of all learners. For a public education system to meet the challenges inherent in educating all learners to their full potential, sufficient and effective resources must in place.

Consideration should be given to the following issues around inclusive education that were raised with the committee during the consultation phase:

- Inclusive education must be flexible and responsive to all children's individual needs—specific programs may require specific teacher expertise.
- Inclusive education service delivery models must allow for instruction outside the regular class setting as appropriate.
- There needs to be a greater recognition of the needs of gifted and talented students.
- A greater emphasis is needed on the co-teaching model (resource/learning centre teacher and classroom teacher within the classroom).
- Curriculum materials must reflect the diverse needs of learners.
- There is a need for more student services consultants who are knowledgeable of specific disorders/disabilities.
- The success of inclusive schooling in the elementary years is not carrying through to junior and senior high levels.
- A school culture must be cultivated where principals provide leadership through both a knowledge of and a commitment to an inclusive educational philosophy.
- Inclusive education requires acceptance by educators and administration that successful schools recognize the wide range of educational needs present in the student population and acknowledge it is their role and responsibility to meet these challenges to ensure an optimum learning environment for all students.

The committee encourages the Department of Education to consider closely the current educational research regarding Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Universal Instructional Design (UID). The principles of UID relate to accessibility, fairness, consistency, and flexibility in the design of learning materials, activities, and space. Planning effectively for all learners is the foundation of inclusive schooling, and universal design works from this premise.

The committee also encourages the Department of Education to ensure that attention is paid to inclusive education in the school accreditation process.

2.0 The Department of Education appoint a provincial Learning Disabilities Consultant by the fall of 2008.

The number of learners diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder make up a statistically significant proportion of the total number of learners in our province requiring access to services for students with special needs. During the consultation phase of this review, many parents and educators expressed the concern that many students with learning disabilities, severe learning disabilities, and/or attention deficit disorder and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are currently not well served in our school system.

The Learning Disabilities Consultant would

- bring a provincial perspective to service delivery and program challenges related to students with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and work with school boards to bring forward viable solutions
- be responsible for the enhancement and supervision of the Severe Learning Disabilities program
- work with school boards on developing appropriate identification, assessment, and program planning protocols for students with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
- be a key player in developing a provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy
- collaborate with the Department of Education, NSTU, teacher education institutions, and school boards in the area of professional development
- work with other governmental departments and agencies to ensure that the needs of learners with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorder, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder are properly addressed
- assist school boards in the work already begun in the area of developing a Responsiveness to Intervention approach to assessment and programming.

The field of learning disabilities is complex, and leadership from the Department of Education is essential.

2.1 The Department of Education develop and implement a provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy in the 2008–2009 school year.

A provincial Learning Disabilities Strategy would:

- emphasize the importance of early identification and early intervention in helping meet learning challenges
- bring best practices to the fore
- help identify the resources and supports that are needed in order to put effective services and programs in place
- organize appropriate professional development opportunities for staff and information sharing with parents.

Provincial and board initiatives in the area of Autism Spectrum Disorders over the past number of years have been effective and well received. Much good work has been done in this very dynamic and controversial area of programming. The success of the various initiatives reinforce the importance of interagency collaboration, cooperation and leadership from the Department of Education. Provincial coordination to the same extent is needed at this time in the area of Learning Disabilities programming.

3.0 The Minister of Education and government announce the end of the Tuition Support Program effective June 30, 2010.

During the consultation phase of the review, some parents of students attending private special education schools made the following requests:

- desire for public school programs that are comparable to those offered by designated private special education schools
- lifting of the time limit on the number of years tuition support will be provided
- more designated special education/private schools
- all costs associated with a non-public school placement be fully funded when a school board cannot meet a student's special needs
- the appointment of an ombudsman be seriously considered, in lieu of the current tuition agreement/support application appeals process

Parents have been and continue to be strong advocates for their children. When these parents felt the public school system had failed to meet the needs of their children, they made financial sacrifices to have them attend private schools.

The review committee appreciates the challenges facing these families. However, the real issue for the review committee was the appropriateness of the Tuition Support Program as part of public education. The program has limited access, as two schools are in the Halifax Regional Municipality and one is in the Annapolis Valley.

The government has a responsibility "to provide for a publicly funded school system whose primary mandate is to provide education programs and services for students to enable them to develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable economy."(Education Act, p. 3) A school board is required to "make provision for the education and instruction of all students enrolled in its schools and programs" and to "develop and implement educational programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings with their peers" (Education Act p. 23).

Therefore, the Department of Education must adequately fund school boards to enable them to respond to the learning needs of all students, including those with special needs. Some learners may, at times, require specialized instruction, such as low pupil-teacher ratios and/or teachers with specific competencies in teaching students with disabilities. However, when the program planning team, of which the students' parents are members, and the school board staff have determined that the student's needs for learning cannot be met within the board's system, the Department of Education's *Guidelines Regarding Tuition Agreements for Students with Special Needs* (1997) detail a process to be followed. Through this process, boards can consider tuition agreements with private schools to support individual placements for students with special needs, as well as develop policy to meet their specific contexts. It is important to note that the guidelines for tuition agreements require the home school board of the student placed in a private school continue its responsibility for reviewing and evaluating the student's progress throughout the school year.

The committee believes that the tuition agreement provision of the Education Act 64(3)(c) can adequately address situations when students require services and/or programs not available or reasonably accessible within their local school boards. The committee would recommend that the current appeals process be reviewed with respect to the tuition agreement provision to ensure that it is not unduly onerous for parents.

3.1 The Minister of Education redirect all funds (tuition funding unit and supplement, administrative costs) currently allocated for the Tuition Support Program to school boards to assist in their efforts to offer effective programs and supports to students with learning disabilities.

The 2006–2007 cost for the tuition support program is approximately $1 million.

3.2 The Minister of Education enhance the resources and supports presently in place for the Severe Learning Disabilities (SLD) Program to ensure that all students requiring this program have access.

Many school boards have used targeted funding to hire itinerant teachers who provide specialized support to identified students and consult with their teachers and/or have set up congregated classes and courses. Currently, the SLD program has been successful in providing support to approximately 600 students across the province in their home communities.

When implementing the SLD program in the mid-1990s, the Department of Education had as its goal improving equity across the province in terms of specialized instruction for students with severe learning disabilities. It reallocated money that had previously been used through an APSEA-administered program to support a small number of students (approximately 65) to attend private schools for students with learning disabilities.

Unfortunately, the funds for this program have not increased over 10 years. As a result, the same level of funding supports fewer teachers in 2007. Many students who might benefit from more intensive, specialized support are not able to access the limited number of spaces in the program. More adequate funding for this program could allow more intensive support for more students. In addition, the program could be provided for more than the maximum of two years that most school boards have had to impose to deal with the numbers of applicants. An examination of the service delivery models of the SLD programs in each school board with a view to exploring more flexible placement and programming options should also be considered.[5]

4.0 The Department of Education do a board-by-board audit of the role and assignment of teacher assistants.[6]

The most important question guiding the audit would be: What role and responsibility must the teacher assistant position have in the systemic capacity building of the public school system to respond to the special needs of its students?

The teacher assistant is an important position in the implementation of the public schools' inclusive schooling policies and practices for some students with special needs. However, when there is role confusion or inappropriate assignment of teacher assistants, the results can be detrimental to both students and the goals of inclusive schooling overall. Classroom teachers are often unsure of how to work effectively with teacher assistants. When teacher assistant roles are unclear, it can lead to less interaction between students with disabilities and the classroom teacher (Hill 2003). Many parents in a review of special education in British Columbia expressed concern that their children were being taught by teacher assistants instead of teachers (Siegel and Ladyman 2000). It is vital to remember that all students have the right to quality education and qualified teachers (Nova Scotia *Special Education Policy Manual*, p.13).

During the consultation process, teacher assistants shared specific concerns about job responsibilities in terms of the education and training required and the role they play in the program planning process for students with special needs. Information provided by parents and teacher assistants during this review process demonstrated to the committee that many teacher assistants have little or no time to consult with the teachers to whom they are assigned to

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[5] The committee gives credit to the health professionals within the Clinical Neurosciences and Rehabilitation team of the IWK Health Centre for their succinct wording around this issue.

[6] The term "teacher assistant" refers to any person employed by a school board who meets the job description contained within the *Teacher Assistant Guidelines* (1998).

support. Furthermore, they are often engaged in activities that extend beyond their job responsibilities, such as reporting to parents, planning and initiating learning activities, and assessing student progress.

Parents expressed concerns about the general and specialized preparation that teacher assistants require in order to meet individual student needs as well as the flexibility of the hours of assignment. In addition, many parents felt there was a need for a review of the practical role the teacher assistant plays in the classroom/life of a student. Parents would like to see guidelines established around the continuity of service provided by teacher assistants.

Many parents of students with disabilities expressed their concerns about support for their children in school in terms of "fighting for" teacher assistant time, communicating to the review committee that the teacher assistant position has become synonymous with individualized programming for many families. Although the provincial *Teacher Assistant Guidelines* point out that teacher assistants are assigned to teachers in order to meet the needs of their students, it appears that in practice many teacher assistants are de facto assigned to specific students. The assignment of a teacher assistant to a teacher or a classroom does not guarantee the design and implementation of an appropriate educational program for any specific student.

The review committee is very concerned that a competitive educational marketplace has been created in terms of the assignment and supervision of teacher assistant services, one that can further entrench existing systemic inequities as well as create new ones. This competitive marketplace has been created in part by the limited resources and expertise available at the school level and the very difficult decision-making process that follows related to the allocation of appropriate supports for teachers and students.

The demand for and role of the teacher assistant has substantially changed and grown since the development and implementation of the special education policy in 1996. School boards report that although enrolments may be declining, the number of students with special needs in their schools is increasing as a percentage of the student population. The total provincial salary expenditure reported by school boards for teaching assistants has tripled between 1994–95 and 2003–2004 (Hogg Report, p.53) ($34,671,509). The review committee questions if the role of the teacher assistant, originally conceived through the development of the *Teacher Assistant Guidelines* (1998), is properly understood by school board administration, principals, teachers, and teacher assistants.

We believe a comprehensive look must be taken at this important support service area. The committee wants to see clarity brought to the role of teacher assistants in the support of programs and services for students with special needs. The committee would like to provide this cautionary note: If the number of teacher assistants were reduced without an increase in the number of teaching staff, then capacity to meet the needs of all students would obviously be reduced. This would be detrimental to the system.

5.0 The principles of differentiated instruction form an integral part of the creation, presentation, and professional development of all curriculum and teaching/learning materials.

The English Language Services division of the Department of Education must continue to consult with the Student Services Division at critical points in the curriculum development cycle. Teachers, administrators, and student services consultants expressed the need for curriculum documents to be comprehensive starting points to the planning of programs and units of study for students requiring adaptations and/or IPPs. The Department of Education and/or regional school boards also need to consider how accessible teaching and learning materials are for all learners.

6.0 School boards be encouraged to develop a process to facilitate the loan of assistive technology devices surplus to their present needs.

The costs of some assistive technology could be shared by school boards through collaborative needs planning or bulk purchasing. In addition, school boards could, via a direct board-to-board loan, make equipment available until such time as it has a need for it. The *Assistive Technology Guide* (2006) supports this concept. The lending of assistive technology devices for a short or extended period could assist a school board experiencing delays in the ordering/purchasing process or permit a school program planning team to assess the potential benefit to a student of a particular device. The guide also identifies the Nova Scotia Technology Recycling Program as a source of refurbished computer and related technology. The Nova Scotia School Boards Association might elect to facilitate this loan service by having a "loan registry" as part of its website. A school board could post the item(s) it has available for loan and/or post a request for equipment it may require for a short or extended period.

7.0 The Department of Education review and update the list of Authorized Learning Resources to ensure access to appropriate multi-level and life skills resources at the secondary level.

Secondary teachers need access to learning materials with a variety of literacy levels and content adapted to the range of learners present in their classrooms. As stated in recommendation 18.0, particular attention must be paid to programming for learners with special needs as they move toward completion of the public school phase of learning and prepare for their transition to adulthood.

Access to multi-level resources, as well as materials oriented to the teaching of life skills, would facilitate appropriate individualized program planning as well as the differentiation of instruction for all learners.

8.0 The Department of Education investigate with Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP) the feasibility of accessing services/materials from French language school boards in New Brunswick and/or Prince Edward Island via the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA) structure.

The unique nature of CSAP requires that the Department of Education work collaboratively with CSAP to investigate the feasibility of a co-operative partnership with other French language school boards in our neighbouring provinces. If there is any possibility of assisting CSAP via this route, it should be explored.

Many of the problems faced by school boards are magnified by the provincial mandate of the CSAP. Travel concerns, challenges in attracting and retaining qualified staff in the area of resource teachers, speech-language pathologists, and school psychologists were mentioned to the review committee. A time lag in receiving important curriculum documents that had to be translated was also a concern. Professional development for staff presents logistical difficulties and is very costly.

The review team was impressed with the determination and positive attitude displayed by the staff and board members of the CSAP in their quest to provide educational opportunities to all their students under challenging circumstances.

9.0 The delivery model and core service ratios for student services staff be based on identified needs, travel realities, and the number of schools served.

Supervision of speech-language pathologists and school psychologists, given the special nature of the services provided, is a challenge. This is an area that needs to be addressed through the collaboration of school boards and the Department of Education.

The review committee sees an enhanced role for guidance counsellors in areas such as transition, inter-agency collaboration, and behaviour and mental health issues.

The ratios as set in the Special Education Implementation Review (SEIR) report were based on national, minimum norms and a 12-month service delivery model.

There was general agreement that setting these ratios was a positive step and that regional school boards have worked hard to meet these ratios, with varying degrees of success.

The gap analysis data provided by the Department of Education for 2006–2007 indicated variability among regional school boards in meeting these funded ratios. For instance, in the area of Student Services Administration, all but two regional school boards were well below the 1:7000 ratio. The fact that six boards were well below the ratio was interpreted by the review committee to mean that they were reacting to the demand for programs and services in their jurisdictions. The two regional school boards that were not at or below the ratios may have different staffing arrangements.

Geography, availability of these specialists, and an increased demand for support services are all variables that work against using ratios as the only guide for providing staffing in these support

areas. Establishing a need may be the most challenging aspect of this recommendation, but adoption of a province-wide information system that would involve using the provincial IPP template would provide excellent information in helping determine need. (See recommendation 10.)

It was in the area of speech-language pathologists and school psychologists that the most concern was heard from all parties. This was especially true in rural areas. Long wait lists for assessment and lack of access to direct service and specific programming were common concerns mentioned in most venues. Travel pressures on itinerant and board-level staff are significant impediments to delivering services. Schools that have smaller enrolments and are far apart pose special challenges. School boards described difficulties in finding qualified speech-language pathologists and psychologists to hire.

Current Special Education Implementation Review (SEIR) Ratios are:

Resource/learning centre teachers 1:165
Speech-language pathologists 1:2000
School psychologists 1:2500
Student service administration 1:7000

Recommended Ratios

The core services ratios areas that the committee recommends are as follows:

Speech-language pathologists: 1:1500 by the 2008–2009 school year
School psychologists: 1:2000 by the 2008–2009 school year
Student services co-ordinators 1:3500
Guidance counsellors at a ratio of 1:500
Resource/learning centre teacher allocation of 1:150

One should note that the MacKay Report (2006) reviewing special education in New Brunswick recommends ratios much lower than the ones currently in place for Nova Scotia. MacKay recommends the following ratios as they take into account rural realities and travel time:

Speech-language pathologists 1:1000
School psychologists 1:1000

10.0 School boards protect the allocation of the resource/learning centre teachers and provide at a minimum 0.5 (FTE) units per school.

The gap analysis report produced by the Department of Education based on information provided by the eight school boards is encouraging. This report indicates that school boards are working towards closing the gaps between recommended numbers of core services personnel (based on national averages in the 2001 SEIR report) and the number presently working in the boards. The committee recognizes that principals need a great deal of flexibility in assigning duties to teachers within their schools so that the complete Nova Scotia public schools program

can be offered. It is especially challenging for secondary administrators to find a workable program timetable.

However, access to public schooling programs depends on the work of a competent school-based program planning team. The resource/learning centre position is a key position on this team. Also, trained professionals need to be in place at each school to implement and assess programming for students with special needs. Resource and learning centre teacher positions in schools are vital to effective program planning for all students but critical to those with special needs. The review committee was especially impressed with the youth service facilitator position used in the Strait Regional School Board.

11.0 The government Departments of Education and Finance commit to the establishment of and funding for a province-wide student information system consistent with the demands of public schools.

Information is vital for tracking service and program delivery and also for the effective allocation of resources. Needs could more easily be determined with a province-wide student information system. This would lead to a more equitable response to identified needs than the current system.

A province-wide student information system would help with consistent access to important program planning information for all students. For some students with special needs, the availability of key information is crucial to successful grade-to-grade transition within the school. During the consultation process of this review, parents spoke about needing to "start over" each year with school staff in relation to outlining the particular needs of their children. This situation was often a result of school staff turnover (teacher assistant, classroom teachers, resource/learning centre teachers, and/or school administration.)

In addition, a standard provincial report card and consistent use of the provincial individual program plan template should be required.

12.0 The Minister request that the Auditor General review the service delivery model for speech-language pathology to determine if the maximum effectiveness is being achieved.

Access to service in this area was a significant concern. Parents spoke about lengthy wait lists, lack of direct service, and the break in service during the summer months. The lack of a seamless transition from receiving service from the Department of Health to receiving service from the Department of Education when a child goes to school was a source of frustration for parents. School boards (especially in the rural areas) were concerned with the availability of trained personnel, the itinerant nature of the service, and the heavy demand for assessments. CSAP faces serious challenges in relation to these issues. Due to the specialized nature of this service, school boards reported that it is more difficult to provide adequate supervision and direction to speech-language pathologist staff. Some speech-language pathologists shared that

their job has become one of continuous assessment and report writing rather than substantive consultation and service delivery.

The committee received an informative submission from the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres. The review committee believes capacity could be added through the use of communication disorders technicians. The Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres have successfully enhanced capacity by employing these trained technicians.

In a presentation to the review committee, the Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres pointed out that there are a number of issues related to the parallel delivery of speech-language pathology that do not allow for seamless and consistent delivery across the age span from preschool to school entry and from school leaving to early adulthood. We understand that this is not a new issue, as it was the subject of a working group in 1995.

Service gaps were noted in the following areas:

- access for francophone children
- direct service to school-age children during the summer
- children who are home-schooled
- children in private schools

It would appear that we have created a system that is not the most efficient use of the resources available. This is but one area where inter-agency co-operation is needed.

13.0 The Department of Education target funding for the staffing of guidance counsellors in all elementary schools to support students in the four areas of comprehensive guidance and counselling.

Meeting this target would provide support for students with special needs in making transitions through grades and schools. Guidance counsellors are integral members of program planning teams. Qualified guidance counsellors bring skills and knowledge that inform the planning process and support students and families through program development. The review committee was disappointed that a recent initiative to add guidance counsellors was postponed.

14.0 The Department of Education review and endorse the recommendations related to transition as contained in the 2006 report of the Provincial Transition Committee (a sub-committee of CAYAC).

Grade-to-grade transition was mentioned as the type of transition that both parents and educators were most involved with, while school-to-community transition had the least involvement. Transition concerns at all levels were mentioned at the various forums we attended. Of special concern was the post-school transition for students with special needs. Parents raised the need for a systematic process for communication that is not dependant on specific personnel. Staff turnover was cited as a concern in program and transition planning. Accurate record keeping is important.

Efforts are being made by the Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) to include students with special needs in appropriate courses at the post-secondary level. We were impressed with the programs, services, and supports in place at NSCC to facilitate access. NSCC staff take a very positive and realistic approach in dealing with learners. Their goal is to have all graduates leave with skills that will make them employable. High schools working with NSCC staff are encouraged to make learners aware at the beginning of high school of the opportunities available.

The review committee has been informed that universities also have appropriate programs and services in place for learners with disabilities that require support in order to participate fully in university programs.

The Access to Community Education and Employment Program (ACEE), funded by the Departments of Education and Community Services and operated by the Independent Living Resource Centre in partnership with other community agencies, provides support to youth with disabilities to assist them with the transition from high school to independent living. This initiative is an excellent example of various governmental and non-governmental agencies working together to build the capacity to meet identified needs.

15.0 School boards have, within their staffing complement, a specific position(s) to support school personnel in the development of transition planning in individual program plans, which can be tracked, monitored, and evaluated.

Some school boards have staff responsible for transition processes utilizing targeted funding. This should be evaluated, and if it is found to be effective, then it should be funded in all school boards. This position would help facilitate transition planning with school program planning teams. The school program planning team must still remain closely involved in this process, as they are very familiar with learners, their families, and their needs.

16.0 Government through the Departments of Education and Community Services collaborate to ensure that students with special needs have access and support for post-school learning options.

Learners going on to university receive financial support from public funds and also continue to have their learning needs addressed, as do students who attend NSCC. Learners with special needs who exit our public school system but do not go on to university or community college often face very limited options educationally. Some may benefit from some additional time in our public schools, but some are ready to move on. Educational or training options are very limited, especially in rural areas.

Currently the debate about educational services following secondary school for students with special needs centres on who is responsible for these learners once they leave the public school system. Why is this only an issue for learners with special needs who would like to have viable post-school options?

Given our demographic realities we must not forgo providing any group the opportunity to participate in our society to the fullest extent possible. For a person to have been educated in an inclusive educational system not to be supported through post-school leaving options is unacceptable. This may be an area that presents another opportunity for inter-agency collaboration. Involvement from all levels of government is required. As mentioned above, ACEE is a good example of a collaborative post-school learning program. There are many excellent examples across the province of similar centres offering work experience, employability skills, and daily living skills.

17.0 The Department of Education review the course options available to enable students with special needs to graduate with the skills necessary to be lifelong learners and contributing community members.

As stated in Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together:

"Every student needs opportunities to attain his or her greatest potential, every student can achieve success, and all students need adequate time to learn." (p. vii)

Graduation from our public schools must always be a path to somewhere for all learners. It became readily apparent to the committee that despite many ongoing challenges, parents believe that both academic and social inclusion have worked well in the elementary grades but not as well in junior and senior high schools. It is more difficult to make the adjustments necessary to meet diverse learner needs in a one-track school system, and consideration needs to be given to providing more programming options. Particular attention must be paid to programming for learners with special needs as they move toward completion of the public school phase of learning and prepare for the transition to adulthood.

Parents expressed concern about their children attending courses that are beyond their capabilities and that even with adaptations or an IPP these courses have content that is of limited relevance for their children. As the cohorts of students that have been educated in inclusive elementary schools continue to move into our junior and senior high schools, the demand for a variety of secondary program options will increase.

It is important that all secondary school youth, especially some students with special needs, have access to a variety of programming options such as service learning, work experience, co-operative education, apprenticeships, and youth pathways.

The Options and Opportunities (O_2) Program initiative provides learners with hands-on learning opportunities to help with the transition from high school to work, a career path. or post-secondary education. This program is currently available in many high schools. O_2 offers programs in trades and technology, business education, health and human services, hospitality and tourism, information technology, and arts/culture/recreation.

This is promising program. It is hoped that it will continue to grow and expand to ensure that all learners across the province will have access to this type of programming as appropriate. The

Youth Pathways and Transitions strategy of the Halifax Regional School Board is also a program to be commended for providing enhanced opportunities for learners with special needs.

18.0 The Department of Education, through its participation in the Child and Youth Social Policy Committee, continue its promotion of substantive inter-agency collaboration that works towards integrated services (IS) schools, as well as addressing the recommendations of the Nunn Commission (Appendix E).

The key concerns raised during the consultation process of this review related to inter-agency co-operation and funding were:

- the need for more access to post-secondary options (community placements, work place options, NSCC programs)
- partnerships that might lead to "full-service school" centres
- addressing of mental-health issues
- shared responsibility to support students with extreme medical or severe behaviour issues
- the transition from the Department of Health to the Department of Education with respect to the responsibility for delivery of speech-language assessment and follow-up therapy.

The report of the Nunn commission emphasized the obvious gaps of jurisdiction, policy, and practice between the Departments of Health, Education, Community Services, and Justice that contribute to a child being at risk not only of academic failure but of more long-lasting permanent damage to their health and wellness. As MacKay (2006) has noted, considerations of human rights certainly trump "interdepartmental quarrels" related to effective delivery of inclusive education. Interdepartmental co-operation must be maximized in the province so that gaps as identified by the Nunn report are eliminated. An inter-agency protocol should be a priority for government departments responsible for children and youth in need of special services to support them before entering and during their school years.

Integrated services (IS) schools situate the school as the hub of a network of service providers, and the approach to providing services to all children is family focussed, proactive, and holistic. An IS school would provide ongoing "wrap-around services" through multidisciplinary teams of people that include the family and are facilitated by skilled coaches.

The School-Plus model that the Government of Saskatchewan is exploring makes the distinction between "add-on" strategies of service integration and integrated services delivery. Presently, public school structures remain unchanged while attempts are made to continuously add services and responsibilities. The Schools-Plus model proposes a matrix organization that "will draw all of its resources from existing governmental and non-governmental agencies but will co-ordinate and integrate those resources in relation to the needs of children and youth." (Dr. M. Tymchak (2001).

19.0 The Department of Education continue to provide targeted funding to school boards to host annual information sessions (at the family of school/school level) open to all education partners to highlight and clarify *The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents* and various fact sheets.

It is important that all the education partners be aware of the philosophy and practices of inclusive schooling. The information sessions reported on by school boards in the consultation meetings of this review were considered highly successful. However, this process of educating the public and community partners has only just begun. The information sessions could be aimed at a wider public than just parents and guardians and might include community agencies, Department of Health personnel, etc.

20.0 The Department of Education continue targeted funding to school boards to:

- **support current best practices related to both informal and standardized comprehensive individualized assessment at the school level**
- **include provision of appropriate assessment materials to all schools**
- **provide professional development necessary to all resource/learning centre teachers**

Parents and educators, as well as school psychologists, mentioned the concerns they have about students spending too much time on wait lists for psycho-educational assessments. This wait time appears to have the most impact on students at risk for learning disabilities. "Failure to identify children as early as possible is contrary to the science-based research that clearly shows early identification is paramount to positive outcomes" (Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (2002).

The committee is concerned that "waiting" for a psycho-educational assessment also translates into "waiting" before exploring appropriate interventions for some students.

Since the goal of any individualized assessment is to provide information about the student's learning profile so that better program planning can occur, the committee recommends that capacity be built at the school level to complete more comprehensive individualized assessment and program planning. Resource/learning centre teachers need training in the administration and evaluation of Level (B) testing materials. More comprehensive assessment information generated by staff who know the students will assist greatly with the development of a variety of possible instructional strategies. Further monitoring and assessment of the results of these efforts will only strengthen the validity and usefulness of the psycho-educational assessment for program planning if, in fact, it is still needed.

Responsiveness to intervention (RTI) is an approach to identifying students with learning disabilities that offers some useful protocols for the assessment, intervention, and monitoring of students' progress. At the core of this approach is early intervention for struggling students and consistent progress monitoring in order to generate reliable information about how a student

responds to a particular instructional strategy designed to address his or her needs. Proponents of the RTI research claim that only "treatment resistors" are students with disabilities.

As the Learning Disabilities Association of Nova Scotia stated in its presentation to the committee—it is not necessary or realistic for the review to engage in academic debate about definitions of a learning disability (discrepancy between measured IQ and achievement vs. responsiveness to intervention). However, the RTI approach makes the point that the type, frequency, and timing of particular instructional interventions for students with special needs need to be examined carefully as an integral part of the assessment process. In Nova Scotia are we waiting for students to fail and the gap between potential and achievement to widen before particular services are offered?

21.0 The Minister of Education restrict all or part of the Innovation Challenge Fund to be a dedicated provincial fund to which school boards may apply for financial support to undertake initiatives identified as "priority pilots" by the department. The committee recommends that one immediate priority pilot be the implementation of co-teaching.

Presently, these funds are allotted to school boards on a per pupil basis. Although they still have to make applications and have their proposals approved, there is a limit to the amount a board can access. Some boards may have more pressing needs or unique circumstances. The intent of this recommendation is that school boards must apply for funds in support of initiatives identified by the Department of Education as a priority.

The results of the consultation process reinforced to the committee how creative and innovative program planning and service delivery need to be in order to meet the challenges that exist in Nova Scotia public schools.

A co-teaching model of a resource/learning centre teacher and classroom teacher working together to meet the programming needs of all students in a particular class or course has been shown to be very effective and has the potential to contribute to significant and systemic change in instructional practice. Co-teaching is a recommended practice noted in the Department of Education's *Supporting Student Success* (2002) document. There are many possible co-teaching arrangements for teachers to choose from based on their school contexts, such as station teaching, parallel teaching, alternative teaching, or team teaching (Friend and Cook 2004). Co-teaching models of service delivery build the capacity of classroom teachers to respond to the particular needs of their students while reinforcing the principles of inclusive schooling.

Co-teaching service delivery models are an approach that is strongly recommended by the committee, recognizing that they would be effective only if the recommended caseload numbers and core services ratios related to resource/learning centre teachers were respected and supported.

22.0 The Minister of Education place a high priority on the retention and enhancement of funds in support of students with special needs as presently allocated in the Learning for Life documents, the Innovation Challenge Fund, and the Increasing Learning Success initiative.

The following concerns were expressed to the review committee by various school boards:

- The Learning for Life I and II initiatives have provided much-needed additional resources.
- Funding support must be continued and expanded so ratios are in step with current reality.
- Class composition as well as class size needs to be addressed.
- There must be greater recognition of the need for funding
  - to provide severe learning disability (SLD) programs to all children who require these services
  - to assist school boards with the cost of teacher assistants
  - to fund the costs associated with non-public school placement when a school board cannot meet a student's needs in a public school under the tuition agreement process
  - to fund occupational therapy and mental health services as part of "core services" to be provided by school boards

School boards have been able to meet more and more challenges because of the financial support in the Learning for Life initiatives. As enrolments decline, yet children with special needs become a greater percentage of the student count, sustainable and consistent funding will be even more critical.

23.0 The Minister of Education inform government of the need to establish a capital fund to guarantee barrier-free access to public school buildings.

School boards have been addressing this concern on an annual ad hoc basis. Recently, the Department of Education has constructed a template in an effort to have all school boards report on their facilities' status in a consistent manner. It is important to include playground facilities in the consideration of a barrier-free access site evaluation. School boards and government must give greater recognition to the school as a community facility.

Although barrier-free access must be a priority for students, school boards must be cognizant of the larger community, which includes teachers, parents, and all visitors.

While there may be a reluctance to spend money to upgrade an older school, school board staff must remember that the school may have years of service as a community centre.

23.1 All learners have reasonable access to extra-curricular and co-curricular activities offered by schools to include appropriate transportation and other reasonable supports that promote participation.

Co-curricular and extra-curricular activities are a vital part of all students' school experience. Some parents shared, during the consultation process, how their children were restricted from participating in co-curricular or extra-curricular activities because of their children's specific transportation needs. In some cases, no provision is made to have specially equipped buses available for transporting students with disabilities to co-curricular and extra-curricular events.

In the *Handbook for the Transportation of Students with Special Needs in Nova Scotia* (1999) it states: "Student transportation personnel in the Province of Nova Scotia are committed to the safe and efficient transportation of all students. Providing students who have special needs with safe and efficient transportation requires a co-operative sharing of information among parents/guardians, educators, and transportation personnel." In some school boards, students with disabilities who have specific transportation requirements travel to school on school buses along with their peers, while other students travel by private conveyance in taxis and cars. The reasons for choosing private conveyance by taxi rather than school bus travel need to be examined, as often students arrive late, miss opportunities to interact with their peers, travel in a mode of transportation that is much less safe than a school bus, and are driven by drivers who are less qualified than school bus drivers (Arsenault 2007). As Arsenault (2007) points out, in the effort to meet the requirement for safe and efficient transportation of students with special needs, school boards may be creating a two-tier system that contributes to inequity.

24.0 The Department of Education work in collaboration with all school boards, the NSTU, and university faculties of education to generate specific strategies and incentives to encourage interested teachers to enrol in graduate education programs to pursue careers as resource/learning centre teachers, guidance counsellors, speech-language pathologists, and/or school psychologists.

The results of the review point to a need for further development of the capacity of school boards and community schools to respond to the special needs of their students. Local expertise is required to better address mental health issues, behavioural concerns, as well as assessment and programming related to the needs of students with specific disabilities.

Some positive strategies were shared by particular school boards around the recruitment of core professional staff such as the sponsorship of practica costs for speech-language pathologist or school psychologist placements in rural communities, the creation of a professional development module aimed at teachers interested in moving into program support positions, and collaboration with Acadia, Mount Saint Vincent, and St. Francis Xavier Universities to offer cohort graduate study. A further sharing of these strategies and the development of others would help to create opportunities for the development of additional specialist expertise among our Nova Scotian educators, building on a foundation of competent classroom experience from within our own school system.

24.1 The Department of Education work co-operatively with the Nova Scotia school boards and in consultation with the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) to explore the possibility of an interprovincial protocol to facilitate and expedite the accreditation and certification of qualified candidates in speech-language pathology and school psychology who desire to transfer to Nova Scotia from another province or immigrate to Nova Scotia.

Many school boards expressed concerns about the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified professionals, especially in the areas of school psychology and speech-language pathology. Most notably, CSAP reported that some personnel are often working a seven-day week in order to deliver services in the area of speech-language pathology and school psychology due to the lack of qualified francophone consultants.

The recruitment of newcomers to Canada who have specialist expertise desired by Nova Scotia school boards needs to be carefully examined. The Ontario government recently introduced legislation to break down barriers and help more internationally trained individuals achieve their career goals. The Fair Access to Regulated Professions Act, 2006, requires 34 regulated professions in Ontario to adopt registration practices that are fair, transparent, and expeditious. Elements of the supports put in place by this legislation include loan programs for candidates to cover the cost of bridge training programs, as well as internships in appropriate professional placements. Nova Scotia, through its participation in Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training, may want to explore possible changes to its professional registration in consultation with the appropriate national accreditation associations.

25.0 The provincial teacher education review consider raising the teacher certification standard related to teaching students with special needs (to a minimum of 12 credit hours) so that a major emphasis is placed on issues, knowledge, skills, and attitudes around inclusive education and the instructional strategies required to meet the needs of diverse learners.

Pre-service preparedness of teachers was cited often as a concern during public consultations. The committee reviewing teacher education is strongly urged to address this concern.

Currently, the Bachelor of Education programs at Nova Scotia's four teacher education institutions (Acadia, Mount Saint Vincent, St. Francis Xavier, and Université Sainte-Anne) more than meet the provincial certification standard related to knowledge of students with special needs.

One way to ensure that Bachelor of Education programs will continue to consistently address the need for pre-service teachers to engage with issues, knowledge and skills around inclusive education and instruction of students with special needs is to increase the teacher certification standard to an acceptable level. At present, the only explicit competency requirement of the B.Ed. programs in relation to teaching students with special needs is in the program area called

Human Development and Learning Process. Section 2.2 states: "knowledge of issues related to the education of children with special needs."

26.0 School boards must provide ongoing professional development opportunities so that every teacher who has a probationary or permanent contract has the opportunity to participate in at least 10 hours of special education and/or inclusive schooling–related initiatives as part of the 100 contact hours completed by teachers' through their personal professional development plan (every five-year cycle).

Educators' response form data named program planning, effective teaching strategies, preparation of individual program plans (IPPs), as well as adaptations as pressing professional development needs. In addition, more detailed group and individual written submissions called for more resources and supports in the areas of the IPP process, program planning, and the early identification of students in need of specific interventions or services. The *Time to Learn, Time to Teach, Report from the Nova Scotia Teachers Union Roundtables* (2007) states that significant teacher workload is related to planning appropriate instruction to meet the diverse learning needs of all students within the Nova Scotia public school classrooms.

Results of a Nova Scotia Teachers Union December 2006 survey noted that schools are expected to respond to or participate in (on average) just under 35 different initiatives that are considered to involve tasks beyond classroom teaching. Therefore, it is important to consider how professional development opportunities are planned and implemented. The model of offering full- or half-day in-service days has not been shown to be effective in changing practice (Borko 2004; Corcoran 1995; Elmore and Burney 1999; Fullan 2007). Current research supports "professional learning communities," a more continuous and consistent approach to professional development for educators. There is a range of strategies involved, including action research, coaching, mentorship, and study groups (Leiberman 2000). The key emphasis needs to be on job-embedded learning opportunities, supported at the school site, with teachers having access to the expertise required and time to do collaborative planning and learning together, while ensuring that instructional time is protected.

27.0 School boards have, within their staffing complement, a specific position(s) to support school personnel in the development of appropriate programming and services in order to meet the various behavioural challenges of learners.

As noted by the Clinical Neurosciences and Rehabilitation Team of the IWK Health Centre in their submission to the committee:

"Many students with severe behaviour disorders in our schools have special needs, including autism spectrum disorders, acquired brain injury, developmental and neurological disabilities, and mental health difficulties. Significant advances have been made by a number of school boards in providing behaviour specialists, autism consultants and school psychologists who can provide support and consultation to teachers and administrators in terms of positive behavioural

supports and programs for students. Some school boards have developed innovative partnerships with local mental health services and university researchers to enhance assessment and intervention of these students. These steps are very helpful and encouraging, and we would recommend that these services be made available throughout the Province." (*Brief for the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs*, May 9, 2007)

Conclusions

This review was a challenging task, but one that was made easier by the co-operation received from school board members and staff, staff of the Department of Education, and other agencies. Throughout the process we received valuable assistance from our advisory committee. Through the diligence of the committee, the interest shown by parents and the public, teachers, and other educational partners, we believe we have fulfilled our mandate. As requested, we have reported on the state of inclusion, identified strengths and weaknesses, and identified where more supports and services are required.

Our province is made up of seven regional school boards and the provincial French-language school board, Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP).

The province-wide mandate and structure of CSAP make it so unique that it was difficult to make recommendations that specifically addressed the challenges of this board. The Halifax Regional School Board is also unique, given the reality that it has almost 40 percent of the total provincial student population divided between a large urban (metro) core and rural areas and is the only board with supplementary funding*. The review committee noted that the other six boards have much in common in terms of geography, demographics, and constraints in delivering programs and services. Despite their common demands, the review committee found wide variability among the boards in their capacity to cope with the pressures they face in terms of delivering programs and services. The geography and shifting demographics of Nova Scotia present challenges in the area of program and service delivery. Equity with respect to program accessibility is always a concern.

There is consensus that children should receive their education in their community schools, in classrooms with their age peers. Parents, educators, and others indicated that inclusion seems to be working well in elementary schools, but less so as learners move into junior and senior high schools. To fully determine why this may be so, further work by the Department of Education and regional school boards is needed. The review committee fully supports efforts aimed at ensuring that inclusive schooling policies and practices are effectively implemented across all grade levels. Much has been accomplished thus far, but much is left to be done.

A significant strength of our public school system is the industry, diligence, and understanding of the people who work in it. This is especially true of the people who work on behalf of students with special needs. Staff of the Student Services Division of the Department of Education and school board personnel, both at the board offices and at the school level, are working diligently to provide quality educational opportunities for all learners.

* Supplementary funding is funding from municipal units beyond the mil rate.

The review committee was especially impressed with the level of dedication and leadership provided by Students Services co-ordinators. These professionals were noted to be a major asset, often working well beyond regular work hours and their job descriptions on behalf of students with special needs and their families.

The review committee had a very informative meeting with representatives of the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA). Since APSEA has been reviewed very recently, we have chosen not to make any specific recommendations but would like to go on record to recognize the fine work being done by this agency.

The review committee believes that Reading Recovery™ has been a successful early intervention initiative as part of the Department's comprehensive literacy program. The Early Language Literacy Assessment (the first to be administered in the Fall of 2007) should provide verification of how well students have maintained their gains in literacy.

The review committee believes that the school program planning team is a vital component in ensuring that the needs of all students are met. The school program planning team must be properly supported at both the school and board level. The school program planning team needs to have access to the resources required to help all learners maximize their capabilities. Involved parents are very important in the program planning process. The onus is on school program planning teams to welcome parents as full members of the school program planning process.

Engaged parents have much to contribute. The review committee was very appreciative of all the parents who contributed valuable information during the consultation process regarding their experiences with the Nova Scotia school system. There were many powerful messages contained within each contribution.

The review committee believes there is great potential for adding capacity to our system in the area of inter-agency collaboration and co-operation. We have made specific recommendations in this area. We would ask the Minister to strongly urge government to continue to move in the direction of making the systemic changes necessary to see that the focus is on meeting needs and not on protecting the status quo. Much can be accomplished in this area, but government must set the vision and direction.

The review committee has focussed its recommendations around funding to the realm of priorities, maintaining and enhancing certain identified areas and specific funds. The committee, like William Hogg in his Financial Analysis and Funding Formula Framework (FFF) (2004), felt that "conclusions as to whether the funding amounts the recommended formula produces are adequate or affordable will be made by school boards, the Department, and other interested persons."(FFF p.5)

The committee would, however, point out to the Minister that the Funding Formula Framework is just that, a framework; it is a skillfully crafted document that enables the department to establish a base amount and thereby control the overall expenditures. It is not truly a funding formula, but a process for the equitable distribution of the total funds amongst the school boards.

Just before going to print, the review committee received from the Minister of Education a report from the Provincial Student Education Council (PSEC). The report, entitled *Breaking Down Barriers* presents students' perspective on inclusive education at the secondary level. The key findings of the report are contained in four recommendations.

The review committee was impressed with the group's initiative and interest in this important topic. The review committee endorses the four recommendations and applauds the students' leadership in promoting a deeper understanding of inclusive schooling. The review committee views this report as a positive indication of the success of inclusive schooling. The review committee recommends that the Minister share the PSEC report with all principals.

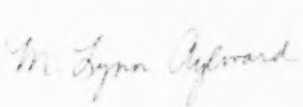
One of the main points the review committee would like to communicate to the Minister of Education and Nova Scotia residents is that our education system must continue to build capacity in order to deliver the required programs and services that educators know provide effective and equitable educational opportunities for all learners. The direction in which our province has been moving in the last 10 years has been positive. Continued progress will require that enhanced human and fiscal resources continue to be allocated by government to ensure that appropriate programs and resources are provided by school boards.

Hopefully, the study and practice of inclusive education will evolve to a point where the terms "special education" and "students with special needs" will no longer be appropriate; all learners will be considered special, and specific educational programs that respond to learner diversity will be the norm. Strong leadership by educators at all levels, support from parents, collaboration among government agencies, and visionary political leadership will be required to continue to make progress in this vital area. The challenges will continue to be great, but the rewards of success will be greater.

The review committee wishes to thank Minister Casey for the opportunity to complete this review. We hope it will assist the Department of Education in making Nova Scotia's schools truly inclusive.

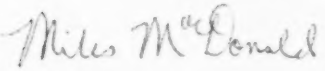
Presented to Minister Casey on July 3, 2007

Dr. M. Lynn Aylward:



Mr. Walter Farmer:

Mr. Miles MacDonald:



Appendices

A 1 Terms of Reference
A 2 Minister's Review Committee of Services for Students with Special Needs
A 3 Advisory Committee
B Partner List
C 1 Parent/Guardian/Community Member Response Form
C 2 Educator Response Form
D Summary Report
E Education Recommendations from the Report of the Nunn Commission of Inquiry
F Resources

Appendix A 1

Terms of Reference: Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs

Background

- Minister had heard from her constituents and from school boards that there are challenges in meeting the needs of children and youth with special needs in the public school system
- The Special Education Policy was released in 1996 and has been supported by ongoing professional development, numerous guides, videos and training.
- In May, 2000 the Minister of Education, Jane Purves, established the Special Education Implementation Review Committee to report on the current status of the implementation of the *Special Education Policy*. The Committee which included representation from parents, teachers, organizations representing children and youth with disabilities, school boards, universities and government departments, released their report in June 2001. The Report contained 34 recommendations to address the identified challenges in the ongoing implementation of the policy.
- In the spring of 2003, the Minister responded to each of the recommendations and through the period 2002 to present, actions have been taken in relation to these recommendations. Of significance is the substantial increase in funding of approximately $10M for professionals and other special education initiatives through both LFL I and LFL II in ensuring adequate specialized human resources are in place to support quality special education programming and services.

Current Status

The provision of special education programming and services to meet the individual needs of students continues to have some challenges. One of those challenges is to ensure that the range of programming and services provided to students is attaining the intended result.

Purpose

The purpose of this review is to determine whether the funding provided by the Department to support individual programming and services initiatives has resulted in the intended outcome, make recommendations that would improve the outcomes of current initiatives, and to identify new programs and/or program adjustments to be considered by the Department that have been shown to be effective to closing the achievement gap for children and youth with special needs.

Process

The Minister has appointed a three member committee and a support person to garner input and data from public education partners and to report on and make recommendations to the Minister on their findings related to:

- The effectiveness and efficiencies of the current special education programs and services.
- Determining the impact, if any, on the classroom learning environment.
- Recommendations to add delete or modify programs and services to better meet the needs of those students receiving special education programs and services.

An Advisory Committee (subcommittee of SEPS) has been established to provide advice on special education issues and stakeholder input. Details of the consultation and information gathering process will be worked out with the committee over the next two weeks.

Appendix A 2

Minister's Review Committee of Services for Students with Special Needs

The committee members are:

Walter Farmer, Chair
Walter Farmer was an educator in the former Colchester East Hants District School Board for 31 years holding a variety of positions including teacher, vice principal, principal, Assistant Superintendent of Educational Services and Acting Superintendent, retiring in 1996.

Miles MacDonald
Miles MacDonald was an educator in Guysborough County for 32 years. He has held a variety of positions including principal, vice principal, guidance counsellor and Acting Superintendent of Schools. Mr. MacDonald retired in 2003.

Dr. Lynn Aylward
Dr. Aylward had taught in elementary and secondary schools across Canada. Her research and teaching interests are in the areas of inclusion and equity within curriculum development and teaching practice. She is presently a faculty member in the School of Education at Acadia University.

Kathy Ross, Support:
Kathy Ross was an educator in the Halifax District and Regional School Board for 31 years. She has also worked at the Department of Education as a Consultant in Student Services and is currently the Reviewer, Tuition Support. Kathy has been a teacher, curriculum advisor, supervisor of student services, and principal.

Time Line
The report is expected to be completed by the end of June 2007.

Appendix A 3

Advisory Committee

Terms of Reference

Purpose

The Review of Services for Students with Special Needs Advisory Committee will provide direction to the Review Team members in relation to issues of the review focus, the review process and the review reporting framework.

Responsibilities

Regarding the Review Focus

- to provide input on the issues that will be examined for effectiveness and efficiency
- to advise on relevant legislation, policy and programming that must be considered
- to advise on existing sources of data and information

Regarding the Review Process

- to advise on individuals, agencies and organizations that should be consulted
- to suggest strategies to consult with stakeholders
- to share expertise related to research techniques, collaboration and data analysis
- to develop guiding questions for the process

Regarding the Review Reporting Framework

- to advise on the components of the report
- to suggest strategies to align recommendations with data analysis, current research, and legislative roles and responsibilities
- to suggest strategies to share findings and support recommendations

Type of Committee

The Review of Services for Students with Special Needs Advisory Committee is an ad hoc committee established by the Minister for the duration of the Review of Services for Students with Special Needs. The committee will consist of six members chosen by the Special Education

Programming and Services (SEPS) Committee including Mary Jess MacDonald, Ron Brunton, Vicki Harvey, Patricia Murray, Annie Baert, and Mary Rothman.

Chair

Meetings of the Review of Services for Students with Special Needs Advisory Committee will be convened by the Review Team members. The committee will meet a minimum of five times during the review. One meeting will be within one month of the announcement of the Review Team members and one meeting will precede the public release of the review.

Appendix B

Partner List

Special Education Review Process
- Education Partners Who Received the Response Form (Community members)

Acadia University School of Education
Adult Services Centres
Association for Bright Children
Atlantic Centre of Support for Students with Disabilities
Atlantic Province Special Education Authority
Autism Society-Nova Scotia
Black Educators Association of Nova Scotia
Bridgeway Academy Association
Bright Children of Nova Scotia
Canadian National Institute for the Blind
Child and Youth Health Services
Churchill Academy
Council on African Canadian Education
Council on Mi'kmaq Education
Department of Community Services Nova Scotia
Department of Health Nova Scotia
Department of Justice Nova Scotia
Disabled Individuals Alliance
Disabled Persons Commission
Equal Education Association of Nova Scotia
Federation des parents acadiens de la Nouvelle-Ecosse (FPANE)
Federation of Home and School Association
HomeBridge Youth Society
Institute for Early Education and Developmental Services
Integration Action Group
IWK-CEO Ann McGuire (Alison)
Landmark East School
Learning Disabilities Association of Nova Scotia
Mount Saint Vincent University School of Education
Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia
Nova Scotia Association for Community Living
Nova Scotia Community College (Disability Services)
Nova Scotia Council for the Family
Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Clinic (Prov. Centre)
Nova Scotia Home & School Associations

Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission
Nova Scotia School Boards Association
Nova Scotia Secondary Student Association
Nova Scotia Society of Occupational Therapists
Nova Scotia Teachers Union
Nova Scotia Teachers Union Special Associations
NS Educational Leadership Consortium
Provincial Autism Centre
Speech and Hearing Association of Nova Scotia
St. Francis Xavier University
United Way Halifax (Sue Barr, Dir. Community Investment)
Universite Sainte Anne
University of Maine (Fort Kent)
University of Maine (Presque Isle)
Administrative Directors of Mental Health Services in the Districts
Cathy Thurston, Director, Mental Health Services, Cumberland Health Authority
Dr. John A. Campbell, Director, Mental Health Services, Annapolis Valley District Health Authority
Mr. Peter Croxall, Director, Capital District Mental Health Program, Capital Health
Dr. Linda Courey, Director, Mental Health Services, Cape Breton District Health Authority
Ms. Susan Mercer, Director, IWK Mental Health and Addictions Program
Ms. Dianna Fortnum, Program Director, Mental Health Services, Colchester East Hants Health Authority
Mr. Hubert Devine, Director, Mental Health and Addiction Services, South West Nova District Health Authority
Mr. Doug Crossman, Director, Mental Health Services, South Shore District Health Authority
Ms. Charlene Thomas, Senior Director, Pictou County Health Authority & Guysborough Antigonish Strait Health Authority

Appendix C 1

Parent/Guardian/Community Member Response Form

MINISTER'S REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

This form is to facilitate your input into the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs. Please clearly indicate your responses in the spaces provided. Your responses will assist the Review Committee in its review of the current process and in developing their recommendations. All responses will be kept anonymous and you will not be identified at any time.

Please mail your responses by **May 4, 2007** to:

Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs
c/o Nova Scotia Department of Education
Corporate Policy Branch
P.O. Box 578
Halifax NS B3J 2S9

You may also provide your input **electronically**, through email at:
reviewcommittee@gov.ns.ca

Responses can also be **faxed** to 902-424-0519

Should you have any questions, please **call**: (902) 424-5294

Information about you

To help us understand who has contributed to the review, we would like to ask you the following questions:

A. Are you filling out this questionnaire as a:
( ) parent/guardian
( ) parent/guardian of a student with special needs in a public school
( ) parent/guardian of a student with special needs in a private school
( ) student
( ) advocacy group/association member
( ) early childhood educator
( ) community member
( ) other (please specify) _____

B. Which school board serves you? (check one)
( ) Annapolis Valley Regional School Board
( ) Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board
( ) Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
( ) Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)
( ) Halifax Regional School Board
( ) South Shore Regional School Board
( ) Strait Regional School Board
( ) Tri-County Regional School Board

C. I have a child at the following level: (check all that apply)
( ) elementary
( ) middle/junior
( ) high school
( ) Not applicable

D. I have been involved in the Program Planning Process for a student with special needs
( ) Yes ( ) No

SECTION I: Inclusive Schooling

1. From the following statements, identify the one that best expresses your understanding of inclusive schooling.

( ) Adapting instruction for students with special needs to increase their participation in public school programs and activities

( ) Placement of special needs students in regular classrooms as appropriate

( ) Placement of special needs students in community schools

( ) Facilitating the membership, participation and learning of all students in public school programs and activities

SECTION II: Identification, Assessment and Program Planning Processes

2. My main source of information regarding the program planning process for students with special needs was: (check one)

( ) School staff
( ) School board staff
( ) Department of Education website
( ) Department of Education publications
( ) Advocacy organizations
( ) Parents or community members
( ) Other (please specify) _____
( ) None of the above

3. I am aware of or familiar with the following Department of Education publications: (check all that apply)

( ) The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents
( ) Program Planning Process Fact Sheet
( ) Adaptations Fact Sheet
( ) Inclusion Fact Sheet
( ) Transition Planning Fact Sheet
( ) Enrichment Fact Sheet
( ) Assistive Technology Fact Sheet
( ) I am not aware of any of the above publications

4. My involvement with the transition planning process has been: (check all that apply)

( ) Home to school
( ) Grade to grade
( ) School to school
( ) School to community
( ) None of the above

5. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
A.	It is effective to provide teachers with classroom release time during the school day to meet with parents/guardians to review Individualized Program Plans.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
B.	The current identification and referral process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C.	The current assessment process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D.	The transition planning process within my school is effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E.	There are a variety of flexible placement options for students with special needs in Nova Scotia public schools.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F.	Adequate efforts have been made by school and board staff to ensure parental involvement in the program planning process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G.	I am satisfied with my level of involvement in the program planning process for my child with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H.	I was provided with sufficient information regarding the program planning process for students with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

6. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Statements		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
A.	When appropriate, the specific training of Teacher Assistants (Educational Assistants) working with my child is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B.	Teacher Assistant (Educational Assistant) time is used effectively during the school day.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. Are there any pre-school /early intervention initiatives in your school region for children with special needs?

( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Do not know

8. Are there any interagency initiatives in your school region related to students with special needs? (For example, the departments of Health or Justice working with the Department of Education)

( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Do not know

9. Do you think there are any specific areas the Department of Education should focus on to improve the education of students with special needs? If yes, please explain what these areas are.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Your input is valued and will be considered in the analysis process.
Deadline for Submissions: May 4, 2007

Appendix C 2

Educator Response Form

MINISTER'S REVIEW OF SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

This form is to facilitate your input into the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs. Please clearly indicate your responses in the spaces provided. Your responses will assist the Review Committee in its review of the current process and in developing their recommendations. All responses will be kept anonymous and you will not be identified at any time.

Please mail your responses by **May 4, 2007** to:

Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs
c/o Nova Scotia Department of Education
Corporate Policy Branch
P.O. Box 578
Halifax NS B3J 2S9

You may also provide your input **electronically**, through email at:
reviewcommittee@gov.ns.ca

Responses can also be **faxed** to 902-424-0519

Should you have any questions, please **call**: (902) 424-5294

Information about you

To help us understand who has contributed to the review, we would like to ask you the following questions:

A. Are you filling out this questionnaire as a:

( ) classroom teacher
( ) private school teacher
( ) teacher educator
( ) guidance counselor
( ) school administrator
( ) school psychologist
( ) resource/learning centre teacher
( ) teacher assistant/educational assistant
( ) board level student services administrative staff
( ) curriculum/program consultant
( ) speech language pathologist
( ) other (please specify)

_____

B. I am an educator at the following level: (check all that apply)

( ) elementary
( ) middle/junior
( ) high school
( ) board level

C. For which school board do you work? (check one)

( ) Annapolis Valley Regional School Board
( ) Cape Breton-Victoria Regional School Board
( ) Chignecto-Central Regional School Board
( ) Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP)
( ) Halifax Regional School Board
( ) South Shore Regional School Board
( ) Strait Regional School Board
( ) Tri-County Regional School Board
( ) None of the above

SECTION I: Inclusive Schooling

1 From the following statements, identify the one that best expresses your understanding of inclusive schooling.

( ) Adapting instruction for students with special needs to increase their participation in public school programs and activities

( ) Placement of special needs students in regular classrooms as appropriate

( ) Placement of special needs students in community schools

( ) Facilitating the membership, participation and learning of all students in public school programs and activities

SECTION II: Identification, Assessment and Program Planning Processes

2. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
A. Providing teachers with time to plan, implement and review Individualized Program Plans during the school day has been effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. The identification and referral process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. The assessment process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. The time that it takes to provide a student assessment by qualified personnel is reasonable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. The Program Planning Process in place at our school is working well.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. I understand my role and responsibility as an educator in the Program Planning Process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. The programs and policies currently in place in my school enable me to effectively deal with behavior issues that arise.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
I. There are a variety of flexible placement options for students with special needs in my school board.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
J. Adequate efforts have been made to ensure parental involvement in the Program Planning Process.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
K. The transition planning process within my school is effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3. My involvement with the transition planning process has been: (check all that apply)

( ) Home to school
( ) Grade to grade
( ) School to school
( ) School to community
( ) None of the above

SECTION III: Support, Training, and Professional Development

4. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
A. The support I receive from school based personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
B. The support I receive from school administration helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
C. The support I receive from school board personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
D. The support I receive from Department of Education personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
E. Training provided to Teacher Assistants (Educational Assistants) responsible for students with special needs is satisfactory.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
F. The roles and responsibilities of Teacher Assistants (Educational Assistants) are satisfactorily defined in my workplace.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
G. The assignment of Teacher Assistants (Educational Assistants) responsible for students with special needs is effective.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
H. Professional development opportunities in the area of Special Education have helped me do my job more effectively.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5. What is your most pressing professional development need with respect to students with special needs?

6. What factors contribute significantly to your ability to respond effectively to students with special needs? (check all that apply)

( ) program materials and resources
( ) targeted professional development in the area of Special Education
( ) time to plan appropriately
( ) clear program planning policies and guides
( ) teaching experience
( ) specific academic qualifications and coursework
( ) implementation of pilot programs
( ) collaboration with colleagues
( ) none of the above

7. Are there any pre-school /early intervention initiatives in your school region for children with special needs?

( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Do not know

8. Are there any interagency initiatives in your school region related to students with special needs? (For example, the departments of Health or Justice working with the Department of Education)

( ) Yes ( ) No ( ) Do not know

9. Do you think there are any specific areas the Department of Education should focus on to improve the education of students with special needs? If yes, please explain what these areas are.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.
Your input is valued and will be considered in the analysis process.

Deadline for Submissions: May 4, 2007

Appendix D

Summary Report: Submitted to the Review Committee by Corporate Policy, Nova Scotia Department of Education

The following report consists of Sections 1.0 to 8.0.

1.0 The Review Process

The following summary highlights the overall key themes which emerged from the Minister's Review of Services for Students with Special Needs.

Feedback was received in a variety of ways. Consultations were held across the province with the general public, elected school board members, and school board senior staff. Meetings were held in Berwick (Annapolis Valley Regional School Board), Yarmouth (Tri-County Regional School Board), Halifax (Halifax Regional School Board), Dartmouth (Conseil scolaire acadien provincial), Truro (Chignecto-Central Regional School Board), Bridgewater (South Shore Regional School Board), Port Hawkesbury (Strait Regional School Board), and Sydney (Cape Breton—Victoria Regional School Board).

To facilitate input into the review, response forms were distributed at public consultations, were made available on the review website, and were distributed to principals across the province electronically. Response forms and written submissions were received via mail, email, and fax until May 4, 2007.

In response to the review the Review, Committee received

- 675 Educator Response Forms
- 498 Parent/Guardian/Community Member Response Forms
- 53 written submissions (13 group, 40 individual)
- 154 speakers at 8 public consultations, where total attendance was approximately 428

This report provides a summary of the information gathered through submitted response forms, written submissions, and the comments and suggestions heard during the consultations.

2.0 Key Findings

The comments and themes that emerged throughout the consultation process are highlighted below. There were several key themes that were repeated throughout the submissions; these are summarized in the "Common Themes" section and then elucidated in each respondent category.

Common Themes

- **Increase training and resources for teachers in the following areas:**
  - The specific types of special needs teachers are dealing with in the classroom; exceptionalities such as, autism, Down syndrome.
  - Developing and implementing Individual Program Plans (IPPs), so there is consistency across the province.

- **Increase training and resources for teacher assistants in the following areas:**
  - The specific types of special needs teacher assistants are dealing with in the classroom.
  - Teacher assistants should be invited to IPP meetings with parents and staff.
  - Require teacher assistants to complete more consistent and rigorous training.
  - More teacher assistants should be hired.
  - Teacher assistant positions should be 100% (not 80% or less as many currently are).

- **Inclusion**
  - There is strong support for the theory of inclusion, however, many respondents noted that integrating every student with special needs in the classroom has not been successful.
  - A "common sense" approach was suggested by a number of respondents whereby students with special needs would take art, music, physical education, etc; with the core group, but be grouped together for subjects like mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Students with special needs would still get the benefit of being included and interacting with the student body, but be in a more comfortable setting for academic subjects.
  - Inclusion is not working as well at the junior high and high school level.

- **Hire more specialists: speech-language pathologists, psychologists, Autism and Down syndrome specialists, and occupational therapists.**
  - Wait times for assessments and treatment need to be reduced.

- **More support and assistance needs to be given to children with learning disabilities.**
  - Students with mild or moderate learning disabilities are not being identified, and when they are, they are not able to access services they need, because there are students with greater needs.

- **More partnerships and programs are needed to address the transition of students with special needs from the school to the community.**
  - Students with special needs should have options to learn life and work skills for when they transition into the community.

- **Shorter wait times for professional assessments and earlier identification and assessment.**

- **Smaller class sizes and supports for class composition are required to properly manage a classroom.**

- **Gifted students are not receiving enough attention and are not challenged to their full potential.**

- **Interagency co-operation and funding (Community Services, Education, Health, and Justice) must be looked at to address deficiencies in the system.**

Key Themes Noted by Educators

- **Training was requested on how to teach effectively in an inclusive classroom, and how to teach multiple grade levels.**

- **Teachers requested more time to develop and implement appropriate programming for students with special needs, including consultation opportunities with parents and educational staff, and preparing IPPs.**

- **Greater access to assistive technology, and training on how to implement it in the classroom.**

Key Themes Noted by the Public

- **Extend and expand the Tuition Support Program.**
  - The Tuition Support Program should be available to students as long as they require the support.
  - All students with documented learning difficulties should have access to the Tuition Support Program, regardless of whether they have an IPP, or other criteria.

- **The allocated funding per student should be made available to parents who choose not to enter their children in the public school system.**

- **Parents should be included more in the program planning and education of students with special needs.**

- **Students with special needs should have consistent access to supports from year to year.**

Key Themes Noted by School Boards

- **Funding to provide release time for teachers has been well accessed.**

- **Concerns were noted in terms of recruitment and retention of speech-language pathologists and psychologists, especially in rural areas.**

- **Materials and resources for high schools need to be improved.**
  - Professional development on new curriculum should be presented in an integrated fashion.

- **Standardized IPP forms are needed across the province—standard templates and language would increase efficiency.**

- **Increase per pupil funding for students with special needs.**
  - More funding is required to meet the increasing number of students with high needs.

- **Teacher education programs need to focus on developing skills relating to students with special needs—skills in differentiation, adaptations, IPPs, behaviour disorders, syndromes, and various disabilities.**

- **Partnerships with other agencies can lead to "Full Service Schools"—services provided by Health, Justice, and Community Services.**

- **Responses to committee request for "one key issue" boards would like addressed[1]:**
  - Provide enough funding to permit school boards to address all identified special needs of their students.
  - Government, through interagency collaboration, should develop a mechanism for the provision of post-secondary educational, community, and/or workplace options and opportunities to meet the transitional needs of high school students with special needs.
  - Increase supports for students with mental health issues.

3.0 Key Findings: Public and Board Level Consultations

The Review Committee conducted eight consultations in: Berwick, Yarmouth, Halifax, Dartmouth (CSAP), Truro, Bridgewater, Port Hawkesbury, and Sydney. At each consultation, Review Committee members met with school board members and staff, and the public.

A summary of what was heard at these consultations is listed below. Comments that are specific to a certain school board are identified.

School Board Presentations

Identification and Assessment

- Importance of early intervention—Three-year "Wellness Clinic for Three-Year-Olds" pilot in Hants County should be rolled out across the province (AVRSB).
- Finding qualified teacher assistants and resource teachers is a significant challenge, travel distance for support staff is a major problem. Where services are available, they are often in English (CSAP).
- Pre-school identification has been invaluable (CBVRSB).
- TEACCH Transition Assessment Profile (TTAP) was piloted in January, and is an assessment profile for adolescent students in social, academic, vocational, and life skills (CBVSRB).

Program Planning

- Funding to provide release time for teachers has been well accessed.
- Providing teachers with time to plan, implement, and review IPPs during the day has been effective and needs to be expanded.
- Need to continue to decrease class sizes and increase funding for differentiated instruction (CCRSB).
- Common terminology and procedures for program planning are needed. One provincial handbook for program planning would be more efficient than each board preparing one (SRSB).

[1] One key issue submission received from Chignecto-Central, Cape Breton-Victoria, and Halifax regional school boards.

Resource and Supports

- concerns in terms of the recruitment and retention of speech-language pathologists and psychologists, especially in rural areas.
- Co-teaching is a new approach to resource teaching that is being implemented.
- Materials and resources for high schools need to be improved. Teachers teach students well below their grade level, but do not have the resources.

Programming Standards and Accountability

- Need standardized IPP forms across the province. Standard templates and language would make things more efficient.
- Collecting and reviewing IPPs and sending back suggestions to program planning teams has been successful (CBVRSB).

Funding

- Increase per pupil funding for students with special needs.
- More funding is required to meet the increasing number of students with high needs.
- Funding should be committed over a three- to five-year period, not annually
- Per Capita funding to school boards for special education does not work for some boards. Staffing ratios should not be the sole indicator (SRSB).

Inclusive Schooling

- Professional development in new curriculum should be presented in an integrated fashion.
- All students participate in information sessions which provide them with a greater understanding of students with special needs (TCRSB).

Teacher Preparedness

- Teacher education programs need to focus on developing skills in differentiation, adaptations, IPPs, behaviour disorders, syndromes, and various disabilities.
- Teachers get specific curriculum and resources from the Department of Education, which has to be used with a vast student community.

Barrier Free Access

- Need more funding for specialized equipment.
- New playgrounds should be designed so that they are accessible to all students.

Inter-agency Responsibility

- Would like to see a shared responsibility for students with severe medical and behavioural needs.
- Partnerships can lead to "Full Service Schools"—services provided by various departments such as the departments of Community Services, Health, and Justice, especially in rural areas where access is restricted.

Elected School Board Member and Board Staff Comments

- Retention and attraction of resource teachers and speech-language pathologists is particularly challenging in rural areas.
- Need to remember that enriched and gifted students are part of special education.
- Focus should be increased on life/work skills for students with special needs.
- The Department of Health three and a half year assessment is crucially missed (TCRSB).
- Need more options for students with special needs returning after graduation.
- Inter-agency initiatives must be recognized as key to providing comprehensive supports.
- If pediatricians write the prescription for teacher assistants, they should provide the funding for that service (CBVRSB).
- "KinderStart" program in Newfoundland should be examined (CCRSB).
- "Verge House Transition Program," students are able to access this program after graduation. Emphasis is on life and community skills, and assisting with transition into the community (SSRSB).
- Class sizes should be determined as they are in Quebec: where a category one student is considered equal to five students.
- Need to determine what exactly it takes to implement inclusion properly and what the resources required will be. Then a decision has to be made. If inclusion can not be funded then a different model is needed (SSRSB).
- Co-teaching and differentiated instruction has been a focus. This model could reduce the pressure to increase teacher assistant support (CBVRSB).

Public Comments

- Extend Tuition Support Program beyond three years and make it accessible across the province.
- The allocated funding per student should be made available to parents who choose not to enter their children in the public school system.
- Teacher Assistants need more training relating to the specific needs of their students.
- Students with special needs must learn employable skills in high school. Life skills are more important than academic studies for some students.
- Parents feel they have to fight for special needs supports (teacher assistant time) from year to year.
- Programs are needed in early childhood education, which can provide early diagnosis and intervention for children entering the public school system.
- The departments of Health, Education, Community Services, and Justice need to work together.
- Inclusion will work for some children but others need one-on-one attention. Some children will do well in the mainstream while others need to be in a classroom with children who have similar needs
- Parents should have a choice as to what type of education their child receives, whether it involves utilizing a purely inclusive approach or not.
- Mild special needs and hidden learning disabilities often get missed in the public school system, it is also difficult for these children to qualify and access ongoing resources.
- More resources for early assessment and intervention, and more specialists to perform the assessments.

- Students with special needs should have increased access to assistive technology.
- Teacher assistant positions should be increased to 100%, and teacher assistants should be invited to contribute to IPP meetings.

4.0 Summary of Survey Responses

The following summary provides an overview of survey responses from both the Educator and Parent/Guardian/Community Member (General) response forms. Responses are compared by respondent type where applicable.

Total response form submissions are listed below:

	Educator Response Form	General Response Form	Total
English	657	483	1140
French	18	15	33
Total	675	498	1173

4.1 Combined Response Form Results

1. For which school board do you work/reside?

	Educator	%	General	%
AVRSB	29	4%	43	9%
CBVRSB	53	8%	29	6%
CCRSB	67	10%	54	11%
CSAP	7	1%	27	5%
HRSB	343	51%	233	47%
SSRSB	42	6%	48	10%
SRSB	78	12%	45	9%
TCRSB	19	3%	15	3%
None of the above	32	5%	NA	NA
Total	670	100%	494	100%

2. From the following statements, identify the one that best expresses your understanding of inclusive schooling:

	Educator	%	General	%	Total
Adapting instruction for students with special needs to increase their participation in public school programs and activities	223	35%	180	41%	**403**
Placement of students with special needs in regular classrooms as appropriate	56	9%	54	12%	**110**
Placement of students with special needs in community schools	9	1%	10	2%	**19**
Facilitating the membership, participation and learning of all students in public school programs and activities	352	55%	197	45%	**549**
Total	**640**	**100%**	**441**	**100%**	**1081**

3. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

Providing teachers with time to plan, implement, and review IPPs during the school day has been effective.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	21%	28%	8%	18%	19%	5%	100%
General	6%	11%	15%	28%	38%	2%	100%
Total	**15%**	**21%**	**11%**	**22%**	**27%**	**4%**	**100%**

The identification and referral process for students with special needs is satisfactory.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	13%	30%	11%	40%	5%	1%	100%
General	33%	31%	16%	14%	3%	4%	100%
Total	**21%**	**30%**	**13%**	**29%**	**4%**	**2%**	**100%**

The assessment process for students with special needs is satisfactory.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	17%	37%	11%	29%	3%	3%	100%
General	37%	29%	15%	11%	3%	5%	100%
Total	**25%**	**34%**	**13%**	**22%**	**3%**	**4%**	**100%**

There are a variet[illegible] flexible placement options for students with special needs in Nova Scotia public scho[illegible]							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	24%	34%	18%	18%	4%	2%	100%
General	32%	32%	19%	12%	2%	3%	100%
Total	**27%**	**33%**	**18%**	**16%**	**3%**	**2%**	**100%**

Adequate efforts have been made to ensure parental involvement in the program planning process.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	3%	8%	14%	49%	24%	3%	100%
General	13%	24%	16%	32%	12%	3%	100%
Total	**7%**	**14%**	**14%**	**42%**	**19%**	**3%**	**100%**

The transition planning process within my school is effective.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	5%	15%	25%	39%	12%	3%	100%
General	15%	19%	21%	28%	8%	9%	100%
Total	**9%**	**17%**	**24%**	**35%**	**10%**	**5%**	**100%**

Training provided to teacher assistants responsible for students with special needs is satisfactory.							
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
Educator	23%	25%	18%	24%	5%	5%	100%
General	16%	18%	11%	21%	8%	26%	100%
Total	**20%**	**22%**	**15%**	**13%**	**6%**	**14%**	**100%**

4. Are there any pre-school / early intervention initiatives in your school region for children with special needs?

	Educator	%	General	%	Total
Yes	272	51%	190	52%	462
No	82	15%	43	12%	125
Do not know	182	34%	132	36%	314
Total	**536**	**100%**	**365**	**100%**	**901**

5. Are there any interagency initiatives in your school region related to students with special needs?

	Educator	%	General	%	Total
Yes	196	37%	101	27%	297
No	51	10%	31	8%	82
Do not know	287	53%	244	65%	531
Total	**534**	**100%**	**376**	**100%**	**910**

4.2 Educator Response Form Results

1. Are you filling out this questionnaire as a:

	Total	Percentage
Classroom teacher	267	40%
Private school teacher	3	0%
Teacher educator	12	2%
Guidance counselor	12	2%
School administrator	52	8%
School psychologist	7	1%
Resource/learning centre teacher	138	20%
Teacher assistant	104	15%
Board level student services administrative staff	9	1%
Curriculum/program consultant	4	1%
Speech-language pathologist	12	2%
Other	55	8%
Total	**675**	**100%**

2. I am an educator at the following level:

	Total	Percentage
Elementary	422	52%
Middle/junior	225	28%
High school	137	17%
Board level	25	3%
Total	**809**	**100%**

3. On the scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A	Response Total
The program planning process in place at our school is working well.	5%	18%	18%	42%	13%	4%	100%
I understand my role and responsibility as an educator in the Program Planning Process.	2%	8%	8%	42%	37%	3%	100%
The programs and policies currently in place in my school enable me to effectively deal with behaviour issues that arise.	12%	24%	14%	33%	12%	4%	100%
The time that it takes to provide a student assessment by qualified personnel is reasonable.	36%	36%	12%	12%	1%	2%	100%
The support I receive from school based personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	8%	22%	13%	40%	13%	4%	100%
The support I receive from school administration helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	7%	20%	17%	35%	14%	7%	100%
The support I receive from school board personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	16%	28%	19%	27%	6%	5%	100%
The support I receive from Department of Education personnel helps me to effectively provide programs and services to my students with special needs.	24%	30%	23%	14%	2%	8%	100%
Training provided to teacher assistants responsible for students with special needs is satisfactory.	23%	25%	18%	24%	5%	5%	100%
The roles and responsibilities of teacher assistants are satisfactorily defined in my workplace.	13%	19%	16%	39%	10%	4%	100%
The assignment of teacher assistants responsible for students with special needs is effective.	21%	30%	15%	25%	6%	3%	100%
Professional development opportunities in the area of special education have helped me do my job more effectively.	16%	24%	15%	35%	18%	8%	100%

4. My involvement with the transition planning process has been:

	Total	Percentage
Home to school	224	19%
Grade to grade	441	38%
School to school	319	27%
School to community	105	9%
None of the above	87	7%
Total	**1176**	**100%**

5. What factors contribute significantly to your ability to respond effectively to students with special needs?

	Total	Percentage
Program materials and resources	428	18%
Targeted professional development in the area of special education	332	14%
Time to plan appropriately	438	18%
Clear program planning policies and guides	268	11%
Teaching experience	272	11%
Specific academic qualifications and coursework	181	7%
Implementation of pilot programs	85	4%
Collaboration with colleagues	412	17%
None of the above	9	0%
Total	**2425**	**100%**

4.3 General Response Form Results

1. Are you filling out this questionnaire as a:

	Total	Percentage
Parent/guardian	128	26%
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs in a public school	205	42%
Parent/guardian of a student with special needs in a private school	50	10%
Student	1	0%
Advocacy group/association member	11	2%
Early childhood educator	7	1%
Community member	13	3%
Other	77	16%
Total	**492**	**100%**

2. I have a child at the following level:

	Total	Percentage
Elementary	225	38%
Middle/junior	162	28%
High school	113	19%
Not applicable	85	15%
Total	**585**	**100%**

3. I have been involved in the program planning process for a student with special needs

	Total	Percentage
Yes	384	78%
No	111	22%
Total	**495**	**100%**

4. My main source of information regarding the program planning process for students with special needs was:

	Total	Percentage
School staff	201	53%
School board staff	28	7%
Department of Education website	11	3%
Department of Education publications	11	3%
Advocacy organizations	27	7%
Parents or community members	27	7%
None of the above	26	7%
Other	51	13%
Total	**382**	**100%**

5. I am aware of or familiar with the following Department of Education publications:

	Total	Percentage
The Program Planning Process: A Guide for Parents	176	20%
Program Planning Process Fact Sheet	104	12%
Adaptations Fact Sheet	107	12%
Inclusion Fact Sheet	75	9%
Transition Planning Fact Sheet	102	12%
Enrichment Fact Sheet	38	4%
Assistive Technology Fact Sheet	74	9%
I am not aware of any of the above publications	189	22%
Total	**865**	**100%**

6. My involvement with the transition planning process has been:

	Total	Percentage
Home to school	196	28%
Grade to grade	218	31%
School to school	147	21%
School to community	52	7%
None of the above	96	14%
Total	**709**	**100%**

7. On a scale shown below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable	Response Total
It is effective to provide teachers with classroom release time during the school day to meet with parents/guardians to review IPPs.	6%	11%	15%	28%	38%	2%	100%
The current identification and referral process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	33%	31%	16%	14%	3%	4%	100%
The current assessment process for students with special needs is satisfactory.	37%	29%	15%	11%	3%	5%	100%
The transition planning process within my school is effective.	15%	19%	21%	28%	8%	9%	100%
There are a variety of flexible placement options for students with special needs in Nova Scotia public schools	32%	32%	19%	12%	2%	3%	100%
Adequate efforts have been made by school and board staff to ensure parental involvement in the program planning process.	13%	24%	16%	32%	12%	3%	100%
I am satisfied with my level of involvement in the program planning process.	13%	20%	12%	26%	10%	19%	100%
I was provided with sufficient information regarding the program planning process for students with special needs.	14%	28%	15%	24%	9%	9%	100%
Teacher assistant time is used effectively during the school day	11%	14%	20%	26%	12%	17%	100%

5.0 Summary of Responses to Educator Survey Question 5

The following summary highlights the key themes that were mentioned in response to question five of the Educator Response Form:

What is your most pressing professional development need with respect to students with special needs?

Direct quotes are included where they are representative of a majority of input on the theme. There were 459 respondents. Themes are listed from most frequent to less frequent.

- **Increase training and resources for teachers in the following areas:**
  - The specific types of special needs they are dealing with in the classroom (exceptionalities such as autism and Down syndrome.)
  - The different types of learning disorders and special needs that exist.
  - How to teach effectively in a inclusive classroom, and how to teach to multiple grade levels:

    How to work with IPP children 1 on 1 with over 25 others in the class, all who need my time.

    I was trained and educated as a "regular" classroom teacher. I do not have any "special education" courses that provide the expertise to plan programs for special needs children that come into my classroom.

  - Supervising, training, and working with teacher assistants.
  - Medical training such as catheterization, physiotherapy, seizure management.

- **Teachers requested more time in the following areas:**
  - planning appropriate programs (effective teaching and learning strategies) for students with special needs
  - preparing IPPs
  - meeting with teacher assistants

- **Professional development for all staff regarding adaptations, IPPs, and program planning needs to be implemented so there is consistency throughout the system.**

- **Greater access to assistive technology—provide the time and training for teachers and teacher assistants to implement technology in the classroom.**

- **Training and resources in the areas of behaviour management and anger management including:**
  - non-violent crisis intervention
  - self-defense
  - how to effectively deal with students who have severe behaviour issues

- **Increase the training and resources for teacher assistants.**
  - Teacher assistants should be included in IPP meetings and have access to professional development.
  - More teacher assistants should be hired.

- **Smaller class sizes are required to properly manage a classroom including students with special needs.**

- **Need to have access to better resources to adapt programming for children with special needs.**

- **Increase communication among school staff.**

- **Increase the number of speech-language pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and autism specialists.**

- **Need shorter wait times for professional assessments and earlier identification and assessment.**

- **Resource and learning centre teachers should take in–services together so they can discuss special needs issues, and not be separated by various grade levels.**

6.0 Summary of Responses to Educator Survey Question 9

The following summary highlights the key themes that were mentioned in response to question 9 of the Educator Response Form:

Do you think there are any specific areas the Department of Education should focus on to improve the education of students with special needs? If yes, please explain what these areas are.

Direct quotes have been included where they are representative of a majority of input on a particular theme. There were 427 respondents, with themes listed from most frequent to least frequent.

- **Comments on "Inclusion"**
  - Significant support for the theory of inclusion.
  - Integrating every student with special needs in the classroom has not been successful.
  - It is very difficult to teach to a wide range of intellectual capabilities.
  - A 'common sense' approach should be implemented, whereby students with special needs would take art, music, physical education, etc, with the core group, but be grouped together for subjects like mathematics, language arts, science, and social studies. Students with special needs would still get the benefit of being included and interacting with the student body, but be in a much more comfortable setting for academic subjects.
  - Some students would be better served in a separate class where life and work skills can be learned.

- To be "inclusive" the proper supports need to be provided in the classroom.
- Requests for professional development around inclusion.

- **Increase the number of teacher assistants in the system:**
  - Teacher assistant positions should be 100% (not 80%).
  - More children with special needs should have access to teacher assistants.
  - Teacher assistants are only available for children who: run away, need assistance with toileting or feeding, or who are a threat to themselves or others.
  - Teacher assistants are needed for children with behaviour and attention issues.
  - There should be a teacher assistant in every classroom
  - Increase the student to teacher assistant ratios.

- **Class composition and smaller class sizes are required to properly manage a classroom including students with special needs.**
  - Classes with a high number of students with special needs should have a smaller class size.
  - Class size should be capped at all levels of schooling to ensure that all student needs are met.

- **Teachers requested more time in the following areas:**
  - teacher workloads must be adjusted to allow preparation time for developing and implementing appropriate programming for students, including consultation opportunities with parents and other staff
  - preparing IPPs
  - working with students with special needs in the classroom

- **Provide more resources and materials for teachers.**
  - Hands-on materials:
  - *Materials to work with students who require lower level resources. For example, students in science 10 who read at a grade 3 level need different texts that cover basic science concepts.*
  - Information on how to prepare and deliver IPPs.
  - The specific types of special needs they are dealing with in the classroom (exceptionalities such as autism and Down syndrome.)
  - The different types of learning disorders and special needs that exist.
  - How to teach effectively to multiple grade levels in one classroom.
  - Supervising, training, and working with teacher assistants.
  - Professional development for all staff regarding adaptations, IPPs, and program planning needs to be implemented so there is consistency throughout the system.

- **Teacher assistants need more specific training/qualifications and in-servicing opportunities.**

- **More partnerships and programs are needed to address the transition of students with special needs from the school to the community.**
  - Students with special needs should have options to learn life and work skills for when they transition into the community. This includes learning how to self-advocate in a positive way.

- **Children with physical disabilities are offered more supports than those with learning disabilities and behavioural issues.**
  - Students with learning disabilities are not receiving the supports they need.
  - Students at higher functioning levels who would benefit greatly with just a little assistance are being missed.

- **Increase the number of resource teachers.**
  - Resource teachers need more time, and are not able to effectively implement the professional development they are receiving, when going back to the learning centre.
  - Resource teachers require more training.
  - Increase the teacher to student ratio for resource teachers.

- **Greater access to assistive technology, Sensory rooms, and Snoezelen rooms is needed.**
  - Provide the time and training to implement technology in the classroom for teachers and teacher assistants.

- **Gifted students are not receiving enough attention and are not challenged to their full potential.**

- **Increase the number of specialists (i.e. speech-language pathologists, psychologists, resource teachers, autism specialists, guidance, severe learning disability specialists, assistive technology specialists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists), and APSEA supports.**

- **Need shorter wait times for professional assessments and earlier identification and assessment.**

7.0 Summary of Responses to Parent/Guardian/Community Member Survey Question 9

The following summary highlights the key themes which were mentioned in response to question 9 of the Parent/Guardian/Community Member Response Form:

Do you think there are any specific areas the Department of Education should focus on to improve the education of students with special needs? If yes, please explain what these areas are.

Direct quotes have been included where they are representative of a majority of input on a particular theme. There were 328 respondents, with themes listed from most frequent to least frequent.

- **Comments on "Inclusion"**
  - Some students would be better served in a separate class where life and work skills can be learned:
  - *Inclusion, in its present form, is happening at the expense of the education of other students... Teaching is being held back by the time spent dealing with severely disruptive behaviour.*

- For inclusion to work, the necessary supports need to be in place.
- It may be more beneficial to place students with their cognitive peers, not their age group peers.

- **Provide more resources and training for teacher assistants.**
  - Allow more teacher assistant time for all students with special needs.
  - Teacher assistants need more specific training/qualifications.
  - There should be more consistency in the assignment of teacher assistants, and parents should not have to fight for teacher assistant support each year.
  - Teacher assistants should be trained on the specific disabilities they are dealing with in the classroom.
  - More teacher assistants should be hired.
  - Teacher assistants should be invited to IPP meetings with parents and staff.

- **Need shorter wait times for professional assessments and earlier identification and assessment.**
  - Psychologists are needed to perform specialized assessments to identify learning and other mental health disorders for young children.
  - There should be greater access to speech-language pathologists for those students who require this service.
  - Occupational therapy should be made more readily available by school boards.

- **Students with learning disabilities are not receiving the supports they need:**
- **Students at higher functioning levels who would benefit greatly with just a little assistance are not receiving it.**

  Learning disabilities are special needs as well. There appears to be plenty of assistance to those with visible disabilities, however, there appears to be a visible lack of assistance for those with learning disabilities.

- **Gifted students are not receiving enough attention and are not challenged to their full potential.**

- **Input from parents in the program planning process should be more heavily weighted.**
  - Parents should be treated as equal partners, and included more in the development of program plans:
    Parents need to be recognized as their child's expert.

    When I meet with teachers, we are meeting as a team representing the 'educators' of my child. Too often, I do not feel licensed educators acknowledge that parents are also the educators of their children.

- **Teacher assistants should be assigned based on the needs of the child, not due to seniority or collective agreements.**

- **Students with special needs should have consistent access to resources.**
  - Parents should have consistent teacher assistant time provided to their child year after year.

- **Greater access to assistive technology—training is needed for teacher assistants and teachers so they are able to properly use this technology.**

- **There should be more options for children with special needs who are transitioning into the community.**
  - A vocational based "graduate program" would help students learn life skills and social development
  - Children with special needs should be taught more life skills to help them gain independence

- **Class size should reflect the needs of the students in the class:**
  - When considering class size, students with special needs should count as two students.

- **There is a role for Designated Special Education Private Schools to complement the public system in teaching students with learning disabilities.**
  - Tuition support should be available for all of those who qualify.
  - Tuition support should be available for as long as the child requires it, not just for three years.
  - Eliminate the need for an IPP in public school to qualify for tuition support.

- **Interagency co-operation and funding must be looked at to address deficiencies in the system.**
  - The Department of Education needs to work more closely with the departments of Community Services, Justice, and Health to assist students with special needs in transitioning into the workforce.

8.0 Summary of Group and Individual Written Submissions

The following summary highlights the key themes found in the group and individual written submissions received by the review committee. Direct quotes have been included when they are representative of the majority of input on a particular theme.

There were 53 total submissions, 13 group and 40 individual. Themes are listed from most frequent to least frequent.

- **Extend and expand the Tuition Support Program.**
  - The Tuition Support Program should not be "time limited," and should be available to students for as long as they require the support[2].
  - All children with documented learning difficulties should have access to Tuition Support, regardless of an IPP or other criteria.
  - The recommendations of Designated Special Education Private Schools and the IPPs they generate should be considered in evaluating students future needs.

- **Increase the number of speech-language pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and autism specialists.**
  - Speech-language pathologists have unreasonably high workloads, and time demands, which affects the quality of their work.
  - More funding is required to hire additional speech-language pathologists, psychologists, occupational therapists, and resource support. Children with special needs are currently being identified too late because they don't have access to specialists.

- **Increase training and resources for teachers:**
  - Teachers need to be trained on the specific types of special needs they are dealing with in the classroom (exceptionalities such as autism and Down syndrome.)
  - Teachers should be trained on how to develop and implement an IPP.

- **Increase training and resources for teacher assistants:**
  - A provincial standard with regard to the education and training of teacher assistants is needed.
  - More funding is needed to restore teacher assistant positions to 100%.
  - School boards must work with individual schools to ensure that teacher assistants are able to participate in program planning, and receive professional development training.
  - There should be fewer changes of assignments for teacher assistants to allow for more consistency and stability for students.
  - Teacher assistants need to be trained on the specific types of special needs they are dealing with in the classroom (exceptionalities such as autism, Down syndrome, and sign language.)
  - There should be funding for more teacher assistant positions

[2] This was the most common response from the written submissions

- **The allocated funding per student should be made available to parents who choose not to enter their children in the public school system.**
  - Per student funding should follow the child from the public system to whichever institution the child attends. This offers parents of children with special needs more choice in how their child is educated, whether it is in a private school, in the class room (inclusion), or in a special needs room.

- **More attention needs to be given to children with learning disabilities.**
  - Children who are well behaved in class do not get the resources they require
  - Students with mild or moderate learning disabilities are often not identified and when they are, do not receive access to services because there are students with greater needs

- **Further clarity is required when defining inclusion.**
  - Need to differentiate between social inclusion and academic inclusion. Inclusion does not have to mean 100% in the classroom:
    The goal of inclusion is for all students to be allowed to be educated with their peers, ensuring that the disabled are not excluded or segregated out. But 'peer' does not only mean age, it can mean similar abilities or similar situations, like having a learning disability.

  - "Inclusion" should be redefined to reflect the perspective of the student.

- **Increase the time spent on developing life skills for students with special needs.**
  - Work initiative programs would help students with special needs to develop the skills they need to secure employment.
  - Social skills development programs would be effective for children at the elementary level.
  - Curriculum needs to focus on preparing students with special needs for independent living, and recognize skill development so they may contribute to the community.
  - Many of the academic courses in high school are not the best placement for students on IPPs.

- **Inclusion works better at the elementary level.**
  - The Department of Education should evaluate the state of inclusion at the junior and high school level and make changes to better serve special education requirements.

- **More programs need to be developed which facilitate the transitioning of students with special needs from home to school, grade to grade, and school to community.**
  - The Departments of Education, Health, and Community Services must address the needs of students with special needs transitioning into the community.
  - Transitioning from year to year and school to school lacks consistency, parents do not know how much support their child will receive the following year.
  - More should be done with respect to transitioning children from pre-school into the school system

- **Better working relationships with other agencies (Health, Justice, Community Services).**
  - An interdepartmental agreement between Community Services and Education would ensure adequate funding of Early Childhood Education Programs (early intervention).
  - There should be closer working relationships with the IWK Health Centres, and their records should be shared with schools.

- **Children with special needs should have greater access to assistive technology and teachers and teacher assistants should also be properly trained in its use.**

- **There is a lack of early identification and intervention programs—assessments should be completed earlier and wait times for those assessments should decrease.**

- **Class sizes need to be reduced, and class composition should be considered when assigning classes.**

- **Parents should be included more in the program planning and education of students with special needs.**

- **Increase the working hours of speech-language pathologists working in education.**[5]
  - Of the 129 FTE speech-language pathologists working in health and education, only 52 (40%) provide year-round services. Speech-language pathologists in education work 195/days/year while health funded speech-language pathologists with NSHSC work 235 days.
  - This means that 1 FTE in education is the equivalent of only .8 FTE (195/235) in health. Most service gaps could be addressed through the integration of existing speech-language pathologist resources. For example, if all 77 (FTE) speech-language pathologists providing services to school aged children worked the calendar year (vs. school) Nova Scotia would gain an additional 13 FTEs at no additional cost.
  - This would allow for significant enhancements (equivalent of $900,000 additional funding) to services for children with special needs. Currently there are parallel and separate service delivery models (health vs. education) for preschool and school aged children.

- There is a role for Designated Special Education Private Schools (DSEPS) to complement the public system in teaching students with learning disabilities.[6]
  - Independent assessments should be employed to determine the suitability of a DSEPS and to assess the viability of a return to the mainstream classroom of the public system.
  - DSEPS's should be considered as an out-sourced partner in education
  - Every school board should have access to a DSEPS.

[5] Based on a submission from Nova Scotia Hearing and Speech Centres
[6] Based on a submission from Churchill Academy

Appendix E

Recommendations on Education from the Report of the Nunn Commission of Inquiry

Recommendation #31

The Department of Education should ensure that there is additional training for teachers and administrators on best practices in assisting students with attention deficits and other disorders, along with adequate funding for assessment and early intervention of students with these disorders on Nova Scotia schools.

Recommendation #32

The Department of Education should consider additional funding of initiatives to develop and sustain programs and supports that encourage "school attachment" for students at risk, either within the regular schools or in dedicated, alternative programs. Without limiting this recommendation, as particular examples I recommend that:

- the department should consider the introduction of and targeted funding for junior high support teachers throughout the province; and
- the department and Halifax Regional School Board should continue and expand their respective "Youth Pathways and Transitions" programs.

Recommendation #33

The Department of Education, in consultation with the school boards, should identify effective measures aimed at enforcing the school attendance provisions of the *Education Act* and reducing the levels of truancy in Nova Scotia schools.

Recommendation # 34

The Department of Education, in conjunction with the Province's strategy for children and youth at risk, should provide Nova Scotia schools with adequate space, staff and programs for in-school alternatives to out-of-school suspension as a disciplinary measure.

Appendix F

Resources

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